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A GOOD SAMARITAN.

Page 95.

CORDS OF LOVE.



IN PERPLEXITY.

Page 35.

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CORDS OF LOVE;

OR,

Who is My Neighbour?

By

M. E. CLEMENTS,

*Author of "The Story of the Beacon Fire," "Bible Stories,"
&c. &c.*

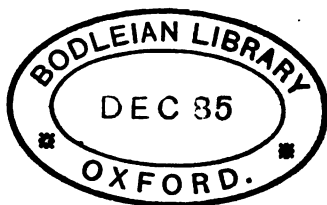


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CORDS OF LOVE.

CHAPTER I.

A MORNING'S WORK, AND A BLUNDER.

ONE bright October morning Charlie Bright was raking the gravel under the window of his master's study.

The window opened door-fashion on some steps which led down to the garden, and on the upper step Mr. Goodbody presently appeared. The morning sun was shining upon the old gentleman's silver hair, while with newspaper in hand and spectacles pushed up to the top of his head he stood enjoying the morning breezes.

"Charlie," said he, "I should like you to inquire how old Mrs. Fair is to-day. Go there as soon as you have done your work."

"Yes, sir," said Charlie, touching his cap, and taking a mental note of the order, as he always did of his master's wishes ; for he strove to carry them

out faithfully, though it turned out that on this occasion he slightly misunderstood what was required of him.

"I am going some distance to-day," said Mr. Goodbody, "and I must take Thomas with me. I know his mother generally expects to see him on a Saturday, and I don't like the old woman to be disappointed. You can explain to her why he doesn't go to-day."

"Yes, sir," said Charlie again, and he was about to resume his raking, but just at that moment Thomas Fair drove round to the front door, and called Charlie to come and stand by the horse.

He laid by his rake at once and went. He patted Robin Gray's neck and spoke soothingly to him. Horse and boy were evidently on the best terms.

Charlie was "odd boy" at Mr. Goodbody's, and a sturdy, honest-hearted, four-square British brick of an odd boy he was. His first place had been in a small inn, where the work was harder and less to his taste than what he was now employed in, and the master was by no means so considerate or so love-worthy as was Mr. Goodbody; but there, too, he had done his boyish best, and would no doubt have risen before long to a position of trust, but being too honest for some people's taste, he had made for himself an enemy. An idle, ill-conditioned boy, some years older than himself, had determined to work him mischief; and by putting hindrances

in the way of his work, and injuring things that had been given into his charge, he had caused the little fellow to be dismissed in some disgrace.

That was a serious matter to poor Charlie, who, being the son of a very hard-working widow, had early resolved to lighten as soon as possible his mother's burdens by taking upon his own young shoulders all that they were able to bear. But the trouble, though sharp, had been of short duration; for Mr. Goodbody, who had the most wonderful knack of helping and comforting every one he met, happened to be a witness of Charlie's dismissal, and in a few days he had found out all the rights of the case, into which Charlie's former master had not taken the trouble to inquire.

So the result of the bitterest grief that had ever yet come into the boy's life was that Mr. Goodbody had brought him to his own bright and comfortable villa residence to help in keeping the well-ordered grounds, and to make himself generally useful under the superintendence of Thomas Fair, who was Mr. Goodbody's right-hand man.

Charlie had now been about nine months in this happy place, and already every tree in the garden seemed to him like an old friend. He had come when the borders were gay with crocuses, and now on the south wall the crysanthemums were bursting into bloom.

After some minutes Thomas appeared again,

carrying some flowering plants out of the greenhouse. These, with a basket of pears, he proceeded to stow away in the tax-car—a present, Charlie guessed, to be left with some one in the town. Mr. Goodbody was always making such presents; and his garden and greenhouses flourished, as those of generous people always do.

As soon as master and man had driven off, Charlie set to work with a will; for he knew that in order to get it done in time for any Saturday afternoon's "outing," he had several hours' brisk work before him.

Having finished raking the gravel, he fetched a broom and wheelbarrow, and began to sweep up the leaves from the walks, for the leaves were now falling fast. And when he had tidied the walks, he began upon the stable-yard—a piece of work which he had only just got through when rosy-cheeked Sally came out to call him to his dinner.

Charlie shook the loose clay from his clothes, and having washed his hands, he went in and sat down to dinner with Sally and Mrs. Jennings.

During dinner, Sally asked him whether he had leave to go out that afternoon; and he told her that if he could get his work done in time he was going to practise his hymns with the school children. For Charlie had a taste for music, and a fine clear voice of his own.

"But, first," said he, "I must go to Mrs. Fair with a message from master."

"Oh then," said Mrs. Jennings, "you shall carry her the tart I've baked for her. I bake her one every Saturday, by master's orders, and Thomas carries it most weeks. I thought I should have had to send Sally to-day."

"Now, Charlie," said Sally, "you didn't ought to have mentioned going to Mrs. Fair to-day, and then I should have had the walk. It ain't fair for you to have ~~all the~~ outing and me none. I think I'll speak to master to give me a holiday now and then." And the saucy girl tossed her head and looked over at the housekeeper somewhat mischievously.

"Speak to master, indeed!" quoth Mrs. Jennings. "A pretty thing that would be! What should you do with a holiday, I should like to know? It's not as if your parents were living in the town here; as it's only natural that child should wish to see his good mother sometimes. Besides, he's a boy."

"Well, Mrs. Jennings, and ain't I a girl?" said Sally in an injured tone.

"I think you had better send Sally with the tart, Mrs. Jennings; she'd carry it tidier than I should. Perhaps I should spill the juice," said Charlie, loath to be the cause of his friend Sally losing the walk she had looked forward to.

"I shall do no such thing," said the housekeeper.

"You'll carry it safe enough, I'll warrant. If you spill the juice, you'll scald yourself finely, so you'd better be careful."

"But, Mrs. Jennings," pleaded the boy—for he knew she would allow him to speak out—"it *ain't* fair, really, that Sally should have no outing. 'All work and no play makes' Sal a dull girl, you know. And really, now I look at her, I think she's growing a bit pale for want of fresh air."

"All work and no play, indeed! all play and no work would be nearer the truth. She gets plenty of fresh air, I promise you, and plenty of play too. If you said, 'All play and no work makes' Sal a saucy girl, you wouldn't be far out. Howsoever, there'll be more to do for all of us soon, and I shall be glad to do my share of it, that I shall," said the housekeeper, looking as if she knew something not yet generally known.

Both the young people asked what she meant.

"Well, it's no secret," said Mrs. Jennings; "I don't see as I shouldn't tell you. Mrs. St. George, master's niece as used to live here before she was married, has come back from the Ingies with her little son. She's been a widow this year back, and master tells me she's coming to live here again; so we'll have some life in the house, I'll warrant. Master he's real glad of it, that he is. You should have seen his face as he told me."

The hearers received this news with pleasure.

Both were glad that the old gentleman's days were to be cheered again by the society of his niece. Sally liked the prospect of having a lady in the house, for she was sometimes discontented with Mrs. Jennings's rule, and she fancied she might have better times with a mistress. And Charlie was delighted at the thought of having a boy about the place. He eagerly asked what age the boy might be.

"Ten or eleven years, I reckon," said Mrs. Jennings. "It's nigh upon twelve years now since the dear young lady went away a bride—to think of her coming back a widow!—and it seems but yesterday." And the good woman drew her hand across her eyes as she spoke.

Dinner over, Charlie went to work again. The dogs were to be fed, and he must prepare their food. Sally went out with him. She did not like to soil her hands with the dogs' mess, so she left that to Charlie; but she liked feeding the pigeons. And indeed the flight of gentle creatures fluttering down from the trees and the roofs of the out-buildings to the spot where she scattered their corn was a pretty sight, and one which the young people were never tired of watching. But to-day there was no time to loiter over it. When the dogs had been fed, Charlie hastened to fetch the parrot's cage for cleaning.

Polly was on her perch in the window. "What's your name?" she demanded fiercely as he laid

hands on her cage. She looked as if she wanted to take a note of his name and address, in case he should make too free with her property.

"O Polly, you know my name well enough—too well indeed," said Charlie, for he remembered what a dance she had led him by repeating it exactly in the manner that Thomas Fair did when he called to him across the grounds.

Polly was apt to pick up any sound that came to her through the open window. And when Charlie was half-way downstairs she began her whistling and calling; but she had done it too often to deceive him now, so she soon got tired of that cry, and broke into a peal of mocking laughter, and then tried to coo like the pigeons; for it was all the same to Polly what she said, as long as she was saying something.

The cage was soon cleaned, and when it had been delivered over to Sally to be supplied with seed and water, Charlie asked the housekeeper for "master's clothes to be brushed."

"There!" said Mrs. Jennings, "you can go now; Sal and I will see to the clothes."

For a moment Charlie was about to accept this good-natured offer; but his sense of duty prevailing, he said,—

"Please, Mrs. Jennings, master's clothes is my work, and it ain't Sal's nor yours neither, ma'am. I can't go till I've done them."

"Bless the child! what a little man it is," said Mrs. Jennings as she went to bring the clothes.

"Well, Charlie, ain't you the biggest fool?" was Sally's uncomplimentary remark. "I'd as soon as not brush master's clothes, and I didn't mean half I said about the holiday neither; I only wanted to worrit Mrs. Jennings a bit. You go off, and I'll brush the clothes."

"No," said the boy; "master's clothes is my work, and if Thomas was here he wouldn't let me go till they were rightly done. He'd call it a mean thing to put my work over on women; and that's just what it is too, and it's what I shan't never do. Master he says as the red Ingins and the savage people do so."

At this Sally went off into one of her fits of laughter, which lasted until Mrs. Jennings returned with the clothes; then she exclaimed,—

"O Mrs. Jennings, Charlie says as the wild Ingins makes the women brush their clothes, and he don't want to be like a wild Ingin."

"I don't know much about such people, I'm sure," said Mrs. Jennings, "but to judge by the pictures in the *Graphic* and such, I shouldn't suppose their clothes gave them much trouble; they don't seem overloaded with them, to be sure."

Charlie took great pains with the clothes, for Thomas had taught him to brush and fold them nicely. When they were finished he brought them

to the housekeeper and said, "Now, ma'am, I'm off as soon as I've cleaned myself; so will you have the tart ready for me, please?"

And a few minutes later he started for town with the tart tied up in a white napkin.

He went first to the Widows' Cottages in Riverside Place to deliver his message to old Mrs. Fair. The old woman greeted him kindly as he entered.

"Please, Mrs. Fair," said he, "Thomas is gone off a long drive with master, so he can't see you until to-morrow; and Mrs. Jennings, she's sent you a tart, and she hopes your rheumatism is better; and please, ma'am, master desired me to ask how old you are to-day."

"Bless me!" said the old lady, "your master hasn't sent me such a message as that; you must be making some mistake, child."

"Please, ma'am, I'm quite sure as master said I was to ask how old you are to-day."

"Bless me!" said Mrs. Fair again; "did he think this was my birthday, I wonder?"

"I don't know, ma'am—I didn't ask nothing; but that was the message, for certain."

"Dear, dear," said the old lady, not over-pleased; "if it was any other gentleman now but Mr. Goodbody, I should say as 'twas mighty inquisitive. Howsoever, people will have their fancies; and they do say old bachelors always has odd ways.

Well, I'm thankful to say I beain't ashamed o' my years. Hand me the almanac, child."

Charlie found the almanac, but it was not such an easy matter for Mrs. Fair to get from it the information she wanted. She first turned it upside down; then she polished her spectacles, and made another attempt; finally she found that the light was not good just then. She had been able to read her Testament and her hymn-book well enough that morning—though, to be sure, she nearly knew them by heart, and could mostly tell what should be on any page she opened at, so long as she had her own book. "But I can't manage this," she said, laying down the almanac. "Come here, child, and find how long it is since the 25th day of July last. I understand your master is particular to a day."

"Well, ma'am, there'd be two months to the 25th of September, and it's the 5th of October to-day, and September has thirty days, so that will be two months and ten days since the 25th of July."

"Just so, my dear. Well, you may tell your master—an' my duty to him—as I've no objection to let him know as I'm sixty-seven years, two months, and ten days, which, I suppose, I'm much the same age as himself; and I wish him many a happy day yet."

"All right, ma'am," said Charlie; "I wish you good-day."

CHAPTER II.

UNDER THE RAILWAY BRIDGE.

THROUGH the open window Charlie had seen the market clock at the other side of the river. It wanted only three minutes of four, and as he should be at his singing class at the hour he must hasten. "I will make a short cut," thought Charlie; so he went out through the back door into the green which was common to the block of cottages, and clambering over a low wall he got down into the stony bed of the river.

The water was very low at this time, for the weather had long been dry. He knew that by keeping close to the wall he could creep under the small arch of the railway bridge almost without wetting his shoes.

It was a wide bridge, and having come out of the bright sunshine, Charlie could not see very distinctly; therefore it was only when he touched the object with his foot that he became aware of the crouching figure of a boy drawn close up against the wall, and

it was only by the surly tones of an unpleasantly-familiar voice that he knew who was thus spending his afternoon in solitary meditation under the shade of the railway bridge.

It was indeed no other than Tom Bent, the terror of Charlie's infant school days, the ruthless oppressor of his more recent years, the enemy who had caused him to be dismissed from his first place.

Such being the relations between the two boys, it is not surprising that our young gardener felt no great pleasure at this unexpected meeting.

"You hold your tongue," hissed Tom, placing himself right in Charlie's way; "just sing out, and I'll murder you."

"All right, Tom," said Charlie coolly, "I ain't a-goin' to sing out, leastways not as long as you keep your hands off me. It's nothing to me if you have a fancy to enjoy yourself in the river. I wonder what you're a-hidin' for, though."

"Hidin'," replied the other fiercely; "who said I was a-hidin'? Mayn't I stop here if I choose? I'll tell you what it is, though, if you says a word to any one about seein' me here, I'll give you a hidin' that you won't forget."

"Hands off, Tom Bent," said Charlie, standing very much at his ease. He saw the advantage the situation gave him over his big antagonist, and he was not slow to avail himself of it. Tom saw it too, and his anger burned the more fiercely against

this little fellow who had never injured him, the more he saw it would be unsafe to touch him. Here was the child he had bullied and tormented for years—his natural victim, as it were—safe, prosperous, and happy, defying him to his face; and he, notwithstanding his superior bodily strength, dared not resent his defiance with the blows and cruel violence that were the only power he was accustomed either to use or to submit to; so he resorted again to fierce threatening.

"I served you a turn before," said he, "and I'll serve you a turn again if you tell. Mind that, you young water-rat; you shan't get off so easy the next time, so none of your impudence neither."

"I don't bear you no grudge for the last turn," said Charlie, who, it must be confessed, took a pleasure in saying what he knew would be galling to his old tyrant. "You've done me a right good turn. You got me out of a hardish sort of a place, and you've got me into the best place in the shire, that's what it is; so I'm much obliged to you, Tom. I should be sorry to do anything to annoy you after such kindness, I should; so perhaps you'll let me pass out now. I shan't tell, I promise you. *There*, I've given you my word for it."

"You'd better stick to it," cried Tom, stung to fury by the little fellow's audacity. "You think as I can't do nothing to you now; but I should soon find a way to make that old fool your master turn

you off as the other one did, for all he thinks you such a good boy, you sneaking, mean—”

“Say that again!” broke in Charlie, now thoroughly roused, and his chest heaved and he clinched his brown fists as he spoke—“say that again, and I’ll fight you, I will, if you was a giant; I will, if you was able to make a jelly of me in a minute. I don’t care what names you call me, for you was always at it—it’s your nature, and you couldn’t speak civil if you tried; but say that again of master, and I’ll fight you, Tom Bent.”

Tom laughed. He really rather respected Charlie at that moment, for simple animal courage was the one virtue he did respect. The exhibition of it seemed to put him in a queer kind of grim good-humour. He moved aside a step to let the little fellow pass.

“You needn’t be afeard,” said Charlie, turning as he was about to quit the archway—“you needn’t be afeard that I shall tell. I think it would be a mean thing to have you caught that way, like a rat in a hole; and, besides, I’ve given you my word. But I’ll fight you whenever you like—either now or when I’m big enough to fight you fair; I don’t care which, so take your choice.”

So saying, Charlie emerged into the sunshine, flushed and somewhat exultant. A former oppressor lay at his feet, forced to be indebted to him for security in his hiding-place. Charlie was priding

himself a little on his own forbearance towards him. He did not consider that the forbearance was contemptuous rather than generous—that he had, as it were, flung it at the unhappy boy, together with galling words, which must have added to the hardness of a position already hard enough.

Meanwhile, Tom still cowered in his unwholesome hiding-place, which he dared not leave. He had been there since early morning, the dreary monotony of the hours varied only by the invasions of water-rats which ran almost over his feet; and he was now becoming wolfishly hungry. For people who try to escape the common lot of labour for their daily bread may suffer worse things in their endeavour to obtain it by other means. To eat bread in the sweat of his brow, as Charlie had done, is after all less hard and bitter than to shiver all day in the dark with no bread to eat.

Tom, however, did not think of this. He only thought that a certain small, despicable person was “in luck,” and that luck had deserted him, a stronger, braver, and altogether a much finer fellow—which proved, what he had long suspected, that luck is altogether unconnected with people’s merits. “But,” thought hungry, cowering Tom, and the thought brought a gleam of satisfaction into his misery, “the little sneak is afraid of me still. I’ve taught him that much. He took good care to say he wouldn’t tell, for all his impudence;

and he won't tell neither, for he's afraid—that he is.”

When Charlie, running to make up for lost time, arrived at the school-house, the little choir had already begun their practice. There was no use in going in until he had recovered his breath sufficiently to sing, so he sat down on the bench outside to wait until they had finished their hymn.

The young voices came through the open windows sweet and clear. Charlie knew the tune well, and he could easily distinguish the words,—

“There were ninety and nine that safely lay
In the shelter of the fold.”

And as he listened to that song a softened feeling came over his young heart; he was no longer self-satisfied and exultant over the recollection of the interview in which he had so decidedly got off best with unhappy Tom. He could not have explained it; he was himself but dimly conscious of a change; but that hymn seemed to bring him in contact with something that put another spirit into him—a spirit before which his former thoughts melted away. He forgot to dislike and despise Tom, and remembered only that he was miserable and forlorn, far away, not only from the bright sunshine and the sweet music, but from—Charlie's thoughts did not quite say from what. They were dim and vague, hardly

thoughts at all, perhaps ; for he was but a boy—a little, brown-fisted, sunburnt “odd boy,” who couldn’t even speak correct English ; so how could you expect him to be able to explain his thoughts ?

As soon as the voices ceased he went in. His lame sister Alice had been expecting him, and a glad welcoming look came into her eyes—a silent greeting to him—as he got quietly into his place among the first trebles. Alice sang with the altos ; but her eyes frequently sought the face of her young brother, and dwelt upon it lovingly, for an “odd boy” may be very precious to somebody.

In the melodies of the hymns that followed Charlie’s voice rose clear and true, and his thoughts perhaps were chiefly occupied with the music ; yet there filtered into his mind from the sweet words certain gentle and tender feelings that disposed him to act lovingly towards all God’s creatures.

He joined Alice when the singing was over, and walked beside her more silently than usual, for his thoughts had gone back to Tom, and to wondering what he had done which made him fear to be seen, and how long he should have to lie in concealment—and all this he could not talk about. Alice seemed to fall in contentedly with his silent humour, and limped along without speaking.

On turning into their own court the first person they saw was Tom’s stepmother. She was asking Mrs. Bright, as she had been asking other neigh-

bours, if any of them had seen Tom that day. Charlie hung back a little, lest he too should be questioned. But Mrs. Bent did not seem very anxious to hear news of her stepson; it was rather a matter of rejoicing to her to be answered in the negative. "No one has seen him since yesterday," she exclaimed in her shrill voice. "He must have taken himself away—a good riddance too. I for one shan't be sorry, and I'm much mistaken if his father troubles much about it either." So saying, Mrs. Bent walked off, and Charlie came forward to meet his mother.

At sight of him the widow's face lighted with pleasure. She put her hands on his shoulders, stooped, and kissed him. Then she held him at arm's length, said how well he looked, and how he was growing; his best clothes would soon be too small for him; he would be a tall man, like his father. Then she kissed him again, and led him away to her room, where the tea-table was set with such simple dainties as she could provide for her boy's weekly visit.

During tea Charlie's tongue was loosed, and he told of the week's doings in his little world—of Sally's jokes, and of Polly's cleverness, and of how they had gathered in the last of the apples, and he had climbed the trees to take them from the top-most boughs.

But when the time came for him to take leave

he relapsed into silence. The voices of Bent and his wife were heard in the court below, raised in the contention that was not unfrequent between them. This recalled to Charlie the incident he had for a time forgotten, and he could not help contrasting his own condition with that of the boy who, unloved and uncared for, was, he doubted not, still crouching, cold, silent, and hungry, in his dreary hiding-place.

It was the thought that he was hungry that took most distinct shape in Charlie's mind, so, as he was about to take leave, he said,—

“Mother, can you spare me a good piece of bread and butter?”

“Bless the child!” said Mrs. Bright, looking at him fondly, as if the capacity for consuming a large quantity of food were a thing any mother might be proud of, “is he hungry again?”

“No, mother, it's not for me; it's for a boy as hasn't got no supper nor tea,” said Charlie, blushing a little with the consciousness of his secret. “Can you spare it?” he added, for he knew that, though he was now in place, there could not be much left after providing for the wants of his mother and sister.

But the widow was not inclined to refuse her boy anything she could do for him, so without asking any more questions she cut him a thick slice from the loaf. He took it, and bid good-bye.

Then he set off at a run, not the most direct way to Mr. Goodbody's, but round by the back of some houses to a place where he could get down into the bed of the river. Here he made his way along by stepping-stones, until he came to the railway bridge. He stood at the entrance of the small arch and looked in. It was gloomier than ever there now, for there was but twilight outside.

"Tom," he called softly, "Tom, are you hungry?" Something like a growl came in reply, so he advanced a step or two into the gloom. "'Cause I've brought you some bread and butter. Come, take it quick," said Charlie, who was in haste to withdraw from this uncomfortable position.

But Tom needed no second bidding; he seized the welcome food and began to eat.

"Are you going to stay here all night, Tom?" said Charlie. But Tom gave no answer; perhaps he was eating too ravenously. "Because if you are here to-morrow, you know, I might bring you a bit of victuals."

"No, you needn't," said Tom, not very courteously. "Don't ask no questions. You may cut now. Perhaps I shall do you a good turn yet for the victuals," he added, by way of thanks.

Charlie was not slow to avail himself of the permission "to cut." Once up the steep bank he ran all the way home, and arrived just in time to throw the gate open for the returning tax-car.

"Well, my boy," said Mr. Goodbody, as he alighted, "I hope you enjoyed your half-holiday. Did you see your mother?"

"Yes, sir. And please, sir, I went to Mrs. Fair, as you desired me, and she says as she has no objection to let you know as she's sixty-seven years, two months, and ten days old to-day."

Mr. Goodbody stared a little on receiving this intelligence.

"Why? what?" said he. "What did she send me that message for? I didn't ask her about her age, did I?"

"Please, sir, you bid me inquire."

"What *do* you mean, boy?"

"Please, sir, I'm quite sure, if you'll only think of it, as you said this morning I was to go to Mrs. Fair and inquire how old she was."

"You're dreaming, child!—Thomas, what does the boy mean? What business of mine is your mother's age? I always thought old ladies didn't like such questions raised."

"That they don't, sir. And I'm sure I can't say what the young chap is driving at, but I will say I don't think as he's *that* impudent as to play a trick in his master's name. He's been making some stupid mistake likely."

"Indeed, sir," pleaded Charlie, not knowing how to contradict his master, yet anxious, above all, to justify his own conduct, "I'm quite certain—as cer-

tain as ever I was of anything—that you says to me this morning, when you was standing in the study window, ‘Charlie,’ says you, ‘I’d like you to inquire how old Mrs. Fair is to-day. Go there as soon as you have done your work.’ Them was your *very* words, sir, if I was to lose my place for it.”

But no such consequence seemed likely to ensue, for the old gentleman had broken into a fit of laughter. He laughed till he was obliged to sit down on a garden chair; and then he laughed till the tears came into his eyes. And Thomas laughed too, though not quite so heartily. Charlie wondered what it was all about.

“O Charlie, you stupid!” said Mr. Goodbody, as soon as he could speak for laughing. “You’re a nice boy to take a message, *you* are.”

Charlie, more and more bewildered, looked first at his master and then to Thomas for an explanation.

“Don’t you see, you stupid,” said the latter, “you’ve been making a mull of it? Master bids you inquire for my mother—how she is in health, of course. ‘Go,’ says master, ‘and inquire how Mrs. Fair is’—old Mrs. Fair, he calls her. And you goes off like a ass and inquires how old she is; as if master would trouble himself to ask!”

Charlie understood it all now, and could not help laughing too; though he was vexed to think he had been so stupid, and he dreaded the quizzing he was

sure to get from Sally. And with reason too ; for, for months after, whenever he was sent anywhere with a note or a message, she would bid him be sure and find out "*how old*" the people were, "'cause master would like to know !"

CHAPTER III.

A BAD NIGHT.

AFTER finishing the meal that Charlie's thoughtfulness had provided for him, Tom curled himself round again, and prepared to get through the hours with such patience as he could, until deeper darkness should make it safe for him to leave his hiding-place.

He could hear sounds of life from the town busy with its Saturday night's bustle—shopkeepers' vans driving hither and thither delivering goods, venders of hot fagots and other dainties announcing their wares, street musicians discoursing their music. Lights began to appear in the windows of the only row of houses he could observe from his position. Seven o'clock struck, and in due time eight and nine, and then there was a falling off in the sounds of business; ten o'clock, and after that they nearly ceased. As the hour wore on the lights began to be extinguished. Tom noticed that half of them had disappeared; and then he noticed no more for a while, for he fell asleep.

He was awaked by a sound as of a terrific peal of thunder and falling walls, accompanied by an agonized shriek. He started up in a cold perspiration, his heart beating wildly. He could not at first remember where he was or what had happened. It was but a moment, however; and then he knew he had heard similar sounds three times since he had come under the arch, but they had not terrified him when he was wide awake. It was only the mail train passing over his head, whistling as it crossed the bridge. Tom stretched himself and rubbed his eyes. He was very cold, and he still trembled with the effects of his sudden and terrified waking. He did not lie down again, but stood with his back against the wall. It must be long past eleven; he knew the mail never went through till half-past, and it was sometimes later. He must have been asleep when the clock struck eleven. He felt his way to the entrance of the arch. The lights in the houses were gone as far as he could see, only the street lamps showed where the houses were. Oh, how bitterly cold it was down there! He rubbed his hands and arms in order to get life into them. A few minutes longer, and the twelve clear strokes told the midnight hour over the silent town.

His time was come; he would not stay a moment longer. Feeling about in the darkness, he found a small rough wooden box, on which he had been sitting. He took it up in his arms, and began to

make his way cautiously along. It was now nearly as dark outside as it was under the arch, so that he had some difficulty in keeping to the dry parts of the river bed. It became more difficult when he had to cross the water. It was not deep except in certain holes, which he thought he could easily avoid; but the idea of a midnight plunge into the cold, dark water was not pleasant. The glimmering of a distant street lamp showed him the place to cross; but, encumbered with a heavy box, it was not so easy to balance himself on the stepping-stones. About half-way over he slipped into the water. It was up to his knees. He was so cold already that the water did not seem to be much colder. But the next few steps brought him nearly up to his hips. He began to think he must have got into one of the deep holes, and he feared to take another step.

In a moment thought after thought passed through his mind. First, he wished from his heart that he had never undertaken the business that had brought him into so much trouble and danger, never had had anything to do with the men who had drawn him into it; and he almost resolved that if he should get through this night, he would consort with them no more. Then Charlie's face rose up before him; he seemed to see him tucked into a warm bed and sound asleep. But somehow he was not now ready to blame "luck," as he had been a few hours ago.

In that moment of danger and suffering he saw himself for what he was—a boy who had gone all astray, who had sought evil and chosen it, and was already reaping the fruit of his choice. He saw now that he had hated Charlie, not for any evil the latter had done him, but because his own works were evil and the other's righteous. He had hated him, and tried to injure him; but his plans had come to nothing. With marvellous rapidity it all passed before him—childhood and school days, and how something had always occurred at the critical moment to prevent him from doing the child any serious harm.

He remembered the spiteful trick he had played him a few months ago—how he had then taken pleasure in the boy's distress, and had been filled with anger and malice when he found his dismissal had led to his greater prosperity. But he now acknowledged the justice both of that prosperity and of his own misery, and he felt it was a good thing his own designs had not prospered. In this terrible moment he would rather know the boy was happy. He remembered the little fellow's recent kindness, and he no longer attributed it to fear. A vague kind of unreasoning conviction came to him that if Charlie knew of his position now, he of all others would be the most ready to help him. So strongly did this fancy take possession of his mind that he almost felt as if the boy were standing near him,

on one of the dry safe places that he knew were not far off, stretching out his hand to him in the darkness. But this thought was banished by the welcome conviction that it was growing lighter. He thought he could make out the bank beyond him, perhaps because his eyes were growing accustomed to the position. No; it was certainly getting lighter: the bank became quite distinct, and there was a faint light as of dawn in the eastern sky. He remembered now it was the rising moon. He had expected to be well on his way before she rose. He *had* dreaded the light, and shrunk from it; but now it was welcome to him—now he could see the black pool in which he was standing, and the gray stones and high gravelly spots close at hand. There was a great boulder that he was almost touching, but in the darkness he had not known it was there; and now he saw with a shudder that if he had continued struggling in the direction he had taken he would have plunged into the black depths of the most dangerous pool in the river. Lifting his box, of which he had unconsciously retained hold, on to the stone, he drew himself up after it; and he then found that there was only a reach of gravel between him and the bank. But the climbing of the steep bank was not so easy, loaded as he was, in the dim light that was only not total darkness. He grazed and hurt himself a good deal in the attempt, and when at last

he paused at the top he found his hand was bleeding. He stanchd it as well as he could, holding it against his wet trowsers; and then shouldering the box, he trudged on resolutely, for now he must either keep moving or perish with cold.

And what was in the box which Tom, through all his troubles, had held on to so determinedly? Only two hares, three pheasants, and two brace of woodcock.

Before daybreak on Saturday morning he had, by appointment, met two men, who gave him this box, with instructions to book it for London by the morning train. Tom knew very well that the men were poachers; and as he drew near the station he received a hint that the police were looking out for a consignment of game, and as he was already suspected of being in league with the poachers, he had no choice but to hide himself until he could make his way unobserved to another station. The dry arch of the bridge was the readiest hiding-place, and one that he thought very unlikely to be entered by any one else. It had been his intention to take the box in time for the evening goods train to the next station on the up-line; but Charlie's intrusion on his retirement, and the sounds of life and bustle that continued to so late an hour in the streets, made him fear to come forth so soon. And then he resolved to take the least frequented road, and go in the dark to a station more distant from

town, and where he thought he would be less likely to be recognized.

It was only five miles across country, but this was a weary walk in wet clothes, and for a boy exhausted with hunger. He arrived at the station, however, long before the officials were stirring—some two hours to wait, and that in the chilliest time of all. Tom was a stout boy, but this he felt he could not endure. He hid his unhappy package in a clump of nettles close to a hedge, and set off again over the fields, under the cold light of the moon in her last quarter.

When he came to a cottage standing by itself, at some distance from the road, he paused, threw some small pebbles against the window, and whistled. He repeated this three times, and then the window was raised cautiously.

"Who's making that row?" inquired a woman's voice above.

"It's me," said Tom. "I want Bill Barker."

"Oh dear!" said the woman; "and why do you come after him at this hour? Barker's asleep, and I daren't rouse him, that I daren't. He's been lyin' sick these three days."

"Has he?" said Tom rather incredulously. "You just tell him that Tom Bent is here. Say I've got his business done safe enough, and a precious job it's been to me. I'm nigh famished along of it. Come down and let me in, can't you?"

"Oh dear, oh dear!" said the woman again, and her tone was both distressed and frightened. "I can't let you in, indeed. Barker's out, that's the fact; he's taken the key of the house with him. I couldn't let you in, Tom; though I'm sorry for you."

Upon this Tom broke into a torrent of rough words, and vowed that if he was not speedily let in, to get warmth and food, he would have it out with Barker, whom he could easily ruin. The woman cried, and wrung her hands, but still protested it was out of her power to open the door. "But if you wait," she said, "I'll make you some tea; and I can give you bacca to warm you while you're waiting."

Tom could not afford to refuse the only quarter likely to be offered to him, so he sulkily consented, bidding her "be quick about it."

So with a string she let down to him some matches, and a pipe filled with tobacco, and by the time he had smoked out the latter, she served him in the same way with a can full of hot tea and some bread and bacon. When he had eaten, he lay down for a while under the shelter of the cottage wall.

In a short time, however, he rose, and with somewhat stiffened limbs made his way back to the railway, where he arrived just as the sleepy officials were turning out to make preparations for the arrival and departure of the early goods train.

The morning light was in the eastern sky when he turned out of the station, after having finally got rid of the box. It brightened as he plodded wearily along towards his home, taking the high-road this time.

An inn about half-way had its door open, and a boy was outside cleaning the windows. Tom asked whether there was a fire kindled inside, as he wished to warm himself and get a glass of beer. The boy pushed down the sash he was cleaning, and shouted to the landlady, who said something in reply. He then told Tom he might go in.

As he entered the kitchen the landlady, who was blowing the fire, laid down the bellows and went to draw his beer. When she returned with it he was standing close to the fire, which brought steam from his clothes.

"Bless me," said she, feeling his trowsers, "but you *be* wet. Where ever have you been, boy?"

"Slipped in the river, missus," said Tom.

She took up the bellows again, wishing to make the fire burn better for him; but as she stooped she seemed to catch sight of something that made her start. She hastily put by the bellows, and left the kitchen without a word. Tom saw her speaking earnestly with the boy outside, who presently ran off as if on some errand, and the landlady re-entering went silently about her work. She seemed to have no further curiosity concerning Tom.

CHAPTER IV.

CHARLIE'S PERPLEXITY.

ON Monday afternoon, when Charlie was at work in the garden pulling up the remains of a row of late peas, laying by the rods for future use, and piling the withered stems into his wheelbarrow, his master, who had come out for a stroll, stood for a few moments watching him silently. The old gentleman had just returned, looking grave and troubled, from the town, where he had been attending to his duties as a magistrate.

"Charlie," said he presently, "we had a nasty case brought before us to-day—a very bad case; and I am afraid your old acquaintance Tom Bent has been in it. Nothing is proved against him yet, but it looks very bad for him—very bad. However, nothing is proved, and he has been remanded."

"Please, sir," said Charlie, his thoughts instantly recurring to his last interview with Tom—"please, sir, what do they think Tom's been doing?"

"Well, there was a bad robbery on Saturday

afternoon at a farm-house about four miles from town in the Barningham direction. The house was broken into, and a large sum of money carried off. The farmer and his wife had gone to market, leaving the place in charge of an old man and a couple of maids. About four o'clock a boy—whom, however, no one can identify with Bent, though the maids say he was like him—came by and said he wanted to take a short cut through the farm-yard, in order to be in time to see a troop of dragoons pass on the highroad. Off went the silly maids to see the show.

“‘A pretty pair you are,’ cried the boy when he found them following him. ‘Have you left no one to take care of the place?’—‘Oh, the place is safe enough,’ said they. ‘Old Robin’s dozing in the kitchen, and Nero’s loose in the yard; besides, we’ll be back in no time.’

“This was just what the boy wanted to know. So he soon after left them, saying he wanted to fetch a lad from the next farm, and appointing a place on the highroad where he would meet them again, and see the dragoons pass. The lad he named was the sweetheart of one of the girls, and she was naturally pleased at the prospect of meeting him. So they went on, and waited and waited, but neither dragoons nor sweetheart did they see, and the boy never made his appearance either. When at last they returned to the farm, the first

thing they saw was the watch-dog lying dead in the yard, horribly butchered ; old Robin in the kitchen, half dead with fright, had been blindfolded and tied down to his chair ; while the house, of course, had been robbed. The old man says that as he was dozing in the easy-chair he was seized from behind, gagged, blindfolded, and bound. He saw no one, but from the sounds he heard he believes there were two men and a boy. He thinks it was the boy who killed the dog ; for he heard the poor beast whine piteously, and after that a boy came into the house. He says he recognized the voice of one man, a fellow called Barker, who has long been suspected of poaching, and other lawless practices ; and this man has disappeared. The foolish maids were too terrified to go out and raise the alarm at once, as they should have done, so they sat down and cried till the master returned ; and old Robin, ever since, has hardly been able to stand ; so the robbers had plenty of time to escape.

“ On Sunday morning, however, at an early hour, Tom Bent was arrested at an inn on the Abbotsville Road. He had evidently been out all night. The suspicions of the person who gave him in charge were aroused by observing a patch of blood on his trowsers, which were also very wet, as if he had been trying to wash off the stain. This falls in with the suspicion that he was the boy who stabbed the dog. He has, however, a recent wound

in his hand, which might account for the blood on his clothes. Indeed, almost the only thing he said in his own defence was that the blood came from his hand; but as he was known to be in frequent communication with Barker, and he was not in his father's house on Saturday night, and he refuses to give any intelligible account of himself during the day or night, or to call a single witness to show where he passed it, there was quite enough evidence to remand him."

"Please, sir," said Charlie, who had been listening intently,—“please, sir, did you say as 'twas about four o'clock on Saturday the robbers was at the farm-house?"

"The girls said, as well as they could say anything for crying, that it must have been about that hour when they left the place; and old Robin says the thieves were gone before it struck five, but how long before he cannot say,—the minutes were like hours to him in that position."

"Well, sir, if 'twere that time it happened, Tom Bent hadn't nothing to do with it."

"Why do you say that? What do you know about it?"

"I know, sir, that at four o'clock on Saturday, or any time from that till six, Tom Bent hadn't nothing to do with nothing out there. I won't say as he wasn't doing nothing at all on Saturday; but he wasn't there at that time."

"You saw him, then, on Saturday?" was Mr. Goodbody's very natural inference.

Charlie hesitated and reddened.

"Where did you see him?" questioned his master. He was beginning to think that Charlie must have been at some mischief in company with Tom.

"Please, sir, I don't know as I could tell."

"I'm afraid you'll have to tell. Remember," he said gravely, "it is a serious matter for Bent. This is no boyish scrape. If we get no further evidence, he will have to be returned for trial at the assizes five months hence; and as it is very unlikely any one will give bail for him, he will have to spend all that time in jail. *Every* honest Englishman is bound to help in having justice done, be it for friend or foe; and I *hope*, Charlie, no private grudge you may have against Tom would cause you to see him suffer an injustice that your evidence would set right."

"No, indeed, sir. Fair's fair; and if I wanted to serve Tom out (which I don't, for he's done me no harm after all), I could ha' got him in for lots of scrapes, without leaving him in for what he didn't do. No, sir; I never so much as thought o' doing such a mean thing as that. There isn't nothing like fair play, *I* think," said the little Briton stoutly.

"Then, how is it that you are so unwilling to

“speak? I can only conclude that you were joined with Tom on Saturday in something you don’t want to acknowledge; still it is your duty to clear Tom from all suspicion of the very serious crime of burglary with violence. I may tell you, our law does not force any one to give evidence against himself, and we should be slow to take advantage of anything you were obliged to admit against yourself in order to clear another; but even if it were likely to bring you into trouble, that ought to make no difference, if you are so fond of what you call ‘fair play.’ I call it justice.”

Poor Charlie! this was worse and worse. First to be suspected of wanting to take a mean revenge on a fallen foe, and now to be charged with complicity in some of Tom’s lawless mischief. He felt very much distressed; and, like many another innocent lad before sterner judges than Mr. Goodbody, he stood blushing and stammering, the very picture of guilty confusion.

“Poor boy!” said Mr. Goodbody compassionately, no longer doubting that it was even so; “whatever offence you have been led into, believe me it is better that it should come out now. See what wickedness and cruelty people who once leave honest ways may come to; and be thankful, Charlie, for anything that arrests you in the beginning of a course which leads to such an end. After what you have said, I must bring you into court next

Monday as a witness in Bent's case; so you will not have much choice in the matter."

Charlie thought that if being called as a witness would really justify him in revealing what would clear his own character with his master, it would be a great relief to him; but he was doubtful whether even a bench of magistrates had power to release a boy from a promise. If he could only see Tom, he thought it likely the latter might release him from it, as he would prefer being convicted of what was no doubt a minor offence to being committed for such a very serious one.

"Sir," he said timidly, "could I see Tom before Monday?"

"Certainly not. Such a thing could not be allowed; it would look as if you were conspiring to cook up a story." And with these words Mr. Goodbody walked slowly off, very sorry to think that the boy he had thought so well of had abused his confidence; for he had now no doubt that Charlie had been in some mischief during his absence on Saturday. "Poor little lad," he thought, "how confused and ashamed he looked. I am very sorry for him, very."

As for Charlie, when Mr. Goodbody left him, he sat down for a few seconds on the edge of his wheelbarrow, and rubbed the sleeve of his jacket very hard across his eyes, leaving thereby a smudge of clay on his sunburnt face. Then he rose, and

resolutely finished piling the withered pea-stems in the wheelbarrow ; and when he had deposited them in the place for which they were destined, he turned towards the stable, there to seek counsel of Thomas.

That worthy man was busy attending to the comforts of Robin Gray, and producing with his lips the peculiar purring sound that seems to be the correct accompaniment to the grooming of a horse.

"Thomas," said Charlie, speaking very slowly and deliberately, "suppose you knew a chap as had got into a scrape."

"Ay," said Thomas, "I should think I did many a time when the chap didn't look sharp."

"But, Thomas," resumed Charlie, after considering how he should put his case in a sufficiently clear manner without revealing particulars, "supposin', first of all, you come upon something by accident like, something as might get a chap into a scrape, and you promised him faithful as you wouldn't tell."

"Well, then, I suppose I wouldn't ; but mayhap I didn't ever ought to have promised."

"Well, but if you did promise, and after that the chap got into another kind of a scrape, and all along of something he hadn't nothing to do with, and you knew that if you told what you'd promised him you wouldn't tell 'twould get him out of the scrape he didn't ought to be in ; but then 'twould

likely put him in for another as he'd brought on himself; and if you didn't know which would be the worst for him."

The question was such a difficult one that Thomas had to desist from his work for a moment to consider it.

"Well," said he, "perhaps I'd first ask the chap himself, wouldn't it be better for him, under the circumstances, that I should tell what I knew?"

"Ay, but supposin' you couldn't do that?"

"I'm sure I don't know what you're drivin' at," said Thomas, and he turned his attention again to Robin's fore leg. "But master could tell you more about such things than what I can; and if you've got into a hobble with anything that way, I think you'd best just ask master. That's the best advice I can give you, without I know more of the matter;" and Thomas resumed his pur-r-r-ring more vigorously than ever. Probably he felt that the state of Robin Gray's coat was something more in his line than the deciding of an abstract question which involved a nice point of honour.

In the evening, when Sally was about to carry a cup of tea upstairs, Charlie requested her to ask the master if he could speak to him that evening; and Sally brought word, "You are to go up when master rings." So Charlie went up and told Mr. Goodbody the whole story of his two interviews with Tom on Saturday.

At the beginning of the recital Mr. Goodbody took off his spectacles and closed his book—an action which showed that he was prepared to give his attention to Charlie's case for as long as it might be required. He had received the little fellow with a very grave face; but, fortunately, there was nothing in his manner which could make an innocent person afraid to speak freely to him. As the story went on, his expression brightened and brightened, till at the conclusion it kindled into the benevolent smile that Charlie knew so well.

"This is a *great* relief to me," he said, when the boy had finished, "a very great relief. As a magistrate, it takes a great burden off me and my colleagues; for the case was one of those most difficult ones in which there is just so much evidence that we dare not dismiss it, and yet so little that it seems hard to commit the prisoner for trial at a distant day. Your evidence puts an end to all question about Bent having had any part in the robbery. But I am, if possible, more relieved to find that you have not been engaged in anything that you need fear on your own account to speak of. I really was very uneasy about it, both for your own sake and your good mother's. You see, under the circumstances, I could not help my suspicions, though, I am afraid, they must have hurt you."

"Please, sir, I couldn't, I couldn't a-bear to have

you think I'd been doin' anything I had need to be ashamed on," said Charlie earnestly; and then he put to his master the question that he had put in a more abstract form to Thomas—namely, was his promise of silence still morally binding on him? and if so, could he refuse to tell before the magistrates where it was that he had seen Tom? And what would be the consequence of such a refusal?

"Well," replied the old gentleman, speaking slowly, and evidently giving his best consideration to the matter, "I like you to be scrupulous in keeping your promise—in fact, you cannot be too scrupulous in keeping the *spirit* of a promise when once you have given it. Perhaps you acted thoughtlessly on this occasion in giving the promise at all; however the promise *was* given. Now, if the case were my own, I don't think I should have much hesitation as to how I should act. Bent evidently was afraid that if you revealed his whereabouts it would get him into trouble. You promised not to reveal it; and you meant, and he understood, that you would do nothing to get him into trouble. That was the *spirit* of the promise. The letter of the promise—that is, the outward form it took in words—was that you would not say to any one, 'Tom Bent is down under the railway bridge.' Now, we will suppose that, without saying this, you induced a person—say, a constable—on some other pretext to enter the place in order that Tom

might be found there. Would you then have kept your promise or broken it?"

"Broken it, sir; worse than if I told he was there."

"Why would it be worse?"

"I don't know, sir, only it seems like it would; it would be meaner like."

"You are right; it *would* be worse, and meaner, because it would be adding hypocrisy to the sin of being untrue to your promise. I think you know what hypocrisy means, Charlie?"

"Please, sir, I think it means making believe to be a deal better nor what you are."

"Just so; and if you tried to persuade yourself or others that you were not a promise-breaker—if you tried to escape that ugly name by keeping the letter of your promise while you really betrayed the confidence placed in it—you would be a hypocrite. It is observance of the letter, while disregarding the spirit, that makes hypocrites for the most part. But to return to your present difficulty. We have seen how you could have failed in your trust, while adhering to the words of your promise; but here we have a case in which, in order to fulfil the trust, I think you may be obliged to disregard the words in which you pledged yourself to it. What did we just now say was the spirit of your promise? What did it lead Tom to depend on you for?"

"That I wouldn't do nothing to get him into trouble on account of whatever he'd been at."

"Yes; and now your telling of what you know, so far from getting him into trouble, seems to be the only thing to get him out of it. So that it appears to me that silence on your part would be a more real betrayal of his trust in you than speaking would. Is that clear to you, Charlie?"

"Yes, sir, I understand all you say, but—"

"Speak out, lad; there's nothing to be afraid of."

"Please, sir, I don't know what Tom had been doing; and supposing something should come out through my telling how I saw him, that would be as bad, or worse, for him than the other."

"I think it scarcely possible that the offence for which he feared discovery can be anything so serious as this; and under any circumstances it is better that he should suffer for what he has done than for what he is innocent of. However, to relieve you of any difficulty you may still have about it, I will see Bent myself to-morrow. I will pay him a friendly visit and talk the matter over. I have no doubt he will gladly release you from your promise of silence when he fully understands what would be the consequence of your adhering to it. Perhaps he may see it will be best for him to state his reasons for concealing himself on Saturday, and to give a true account of how he spent the following night. Of course he shall have to stay where he is until the day to which his case has been remanded. I have great hopes that, in considera-

tion of his having by that time already spent a week in confinement, we shall then be able to dismiss him with a caution. In the meantime you can think over what we have been talking of. Now, good-night."

"Good-night, sir ; thank you," and Charlie, much relieved by the interview, went to bed and slept as soundly as Charlies are wont to sleep.

CHAPTER V.

MR. GOODBODY VISITS TOM.

THE life that Tom Bent had led from his earliest years, the people he had associated with, and their treatment of him, had all helped to make him dull of understanding and hard of heart. Having himself but a dull and uncultivated sense of honour and justice, he could not understand the higher thoughts of others; and so when Mr. Goodbody called on him he believed that the object of the visit was to entrap him into some confession which might be used against him, and for a while he preserved a sullen silence.

But when that gentleman had set before him the consequences of allowing himself to remain under suspicion, and urged upon him the desirability of giving an account of his proceedings on Saturday—so far at least as to prove his absence from the scene of the robbery—he perceived that his best course was at all risks to prove the *alibi*, and he began to consider how he should afterwards *lie*

himself out of the other difficulty; for Tom had never learned to love or value truth for its own sake, and he could not now believe in the advantages to him of an absolutely truthful course. When he spoke, he said sulkily,—

“There’s a chap as could tell that I was far enough away from that place Saturday afternoon, but he’s no friend o’ mine.”

“Friend or not, you would do well to call him as a witness. He can tell but the truth on the witness-table, I suppose.”

The moment of softened feeling towards Charlie that had come to Tom at the time of his own danger and difficulty had long since passed away. He had now no thought about the boy’s recent kindness to him but that it had been done in order to propitiate a dangerous enemy, in whose downfall he must rejoice; and this thought made him determine that Charlie should be forced to speak for him.

“The chap as seen me Saturday afternoon was that young Charlie that’s at your place. Has he told you aught of it?”

“He has; but only after he knew how important it would be for you to prove an *alibi* from Barnstock farm on Saturday. He was most unwilling at first to give any account of his meeting with you, because of a promise he had made you not to speak of it. I would have obliged him to appear in evidence, even if you had not seen the

wisdom of consenting to it; but now that you have yourself spoken of him as a witness in your favour, he is, of course, released from any obligation to silence he felt himself to be under. I do not now ask you what brought you into the position he saw you in at that time. If I were not obliged to act as a magistrate in the case, I might urge you to tell me, so that I might give you advice. As it is, I cannot ask you to accuse yourself. On Monday you will be asked to account for this, as well as for the circumstances under which you were arrested; and I now tell you, for your own advantage, that a true account—the only one that can be confirmed under examination—is pretty sure to be in every way the best for you to give. I can have no doubt there is something you would gladly conceal, but I may tell you that in such a case as this—where circumstances compel you to become your own accuser—magistrates are not disposed to deal harshly. And now I wish to talk with you of another matter.”

And then Mr. Goodbody went on to show Tom in a few words how the idle and worthless life he was leading must inevitably bring him into trouble and disgrace, possibly into some crime such as that for which he had so narrowly escaped being committed for trial; how this incident would give him an opportunity—which might never offer again—of breaking with his former associates and beginning

another way of life ; how, perhaps, it was in order that he might have such an opportunity that all this had happened to him.

"For, believe me," he said, and his voice grew grave and tender as he spoke, "if God has made the 'way of transgressors' hard—and very hard it is sometimes—he does it, in his great compassion, that they may be warned to leave that way and turn to him. Do not think, because bad ways bring you into trouble, that therefore God is against you ; think rather that 'our Father in heaven' is thus warning you against sin, and calling to you to forsake it. The longer you delay to obey that call the harder it will become to do so. How old are you, Tom?"

"Nigh sixteen."

"Sixteen? You are still young,—young enough to learn good habits ; but this would become terribly hard, perhaps impossible, if you were to go on as you are for a few years longer. You will be thankful yet, I hope, that you were no older when all this happened to you. I hope to help you to find some honest way of living. I am afraid you will not like regular work at first ; but take heart—persevere—and you will learn to like it. It is worth trying hard to be honest. You will not then need to hide from any one any more, or to sneak about in the dark. Now I will leave you to think over the whole matter. Think of your life that is

past, and of the time still before you, and make up your mind what you will do. And do not forget 'our Father in heaven,' who wants you to be good and happy, but will certainly judge and punish you if you go on in evil ways." And with these words Mr. Goodbody left him.

It would be hard to say how far Tom understood or believed his words. I think he hardly took in at all what had been said about the heavenly Father. Yet in the words and actions of a Christian man there shone a reflection of that great compassion, and thus a glimmer of light was shed once more into the rough boy's soul, a glimmer never again wholly to go out.

However this was, when the time came for him to appear again in court, and when he was asked to account for his mysterious conduct and his disappearance during that day and the following night, he told very much what I have already told you.

Old Mr. Goodbody's spectacles grew dim, and hearts less gentle than his were touched, when the rough lad told of the terrible night he had had after his day of fasting, of how he had been nearly drowned, and of the cold and wet and hunger, from the effects of which they could see he had not quite recovered, and when he added half sulkily,—
"An' I'm sure I don't want to go against the law no more, for I was 'most drowned an' nigh famished; an' it's a bad business, that it is, an'

don't pay a chap, nohow." He had unconsciously made the best case he could for himself; for it was clear he had been punished pretty sharply already, and what is more, had learned a lesson that people do not by any means always learn from the punishments that men's laws award them. So with a few words of caution and advice Tom was dismissed.

That very day a boy who proved to be the one really concerned in the robbery was arrested in a distant town, and he informed of the other persons. Barker had escaped out of the country. He was in his cottage, and making preparations for departure, at the time that Tom had been refused admission. The other man ~~was~~ subsequently sent into penal servitude.

On the next day but one ~~after~~ Tom's release, when Mr. Goodbody sent for him to carry out his promise of finding him some honest work, the lad had disappeared. On inquiry it was found that his father had refused to receive or shelter him; that there had been words between them; that finally Tom had said if his father would give him five shillings he would never trouble him again. The money was given, with a warning that he need never look for more.

Considering that Bent had known pretty well that the money Tom occasionally brought home, or with which he bought food enough for his own wants, had not been obtained in any honest or

straightforward fashion, and as he had never inquired much into the matter or taken any steps to put a stop to such practices, it was rather hard that he should turn on the lad as soon as they got him into trouble. The fact was, Mrs. Bent, suspecting that Tom's unlawful gains must now cease for some time, and not believing in his willingness to do any regular work, had feared his support would fall too heavily on the family resources, and had induced her husband to take the same view.

That evening Mrs. Bright, who knew the whole story, had in her motherly kindness brought Tom in to supper, and she and Alice had never before seen him so gentle and subdued in his manner as he was on that occasion. He told them he would leave the town that night, but did not say where he was going; and when Mrs. Bright expressed a hope that he had made up his mind to get a living in some honest and manly way, he replied that he had.

When leaving, he thanked them in his rough manner, and expressed a sentiment quite remarkable for him,—

“That young Charlie is the good-naturedest little chap I ever saw. I'm glad he's in luck, I am.”

And that was the last any one knew of him. Mr. Goodbody was disappointed to find that the lad had taken a course in which he would probably be exposed to many temptations to idleness and dis-

honesty, a pressure under which the good intentions he had formed would be likely to give way. However, he hoped for the best; and the joyful event of his beloved niece's return to her old home soon put other matters for a time out of his thoughts.

CHAPTER VI.

ARTHUR ST. GEORGE.

FOR a week before Mrs. St. George's arrival the whole house was in a state of preparation. Such shaking of carpets, and putting up of fresh curtains ; such airing of unused rooms, and bringing to light of old stores. Mrs. Jennings seemed to be perpetually out of breath from her exertions ; while Sally was all day long flitting about with a duster in her hand, and spent the evenings in devising caps and aprons, smarter, if possible, than those she was in the habit of wearing. Charlie couldn't understand the need for all this fuss. He thought the house had always been kept in such excellent order that it could not require any very unusual exertions to make it fit for the reception of a lady ; but when he hinted something of this to Sally, she answered him with such unconcealed contempt for his ignorance of "the rights o' things" that he did not venture any further observation, but just held himself in readiness to be useful, inside or outside, as might be

required. And, indeed, when he carried in some plants from the hothouse to complete the decoration of Mrs. St. George's sitting-room, he could not but acknowledge it was by far the prettiest room he had ever been in. The master had been there himself, hanging pictures and putting new books in the bookcases. The whole place was sweet with the odour of such late flowers as could be procured for it; and Polly, on a new perch surveying the arrangements with much satisfaction, seemed to think they had been made expressly to do her honour. Sally had tried to teach her to say, "Welcome home, mistress;" but not with any great success, for Polly could never accomplish saying, "mistress," so when she had said, "Welcome home," she generally wound up by mewing like a cat, or else she would say, "Welcome home! Pretty Polly!" so that the effect on the whole was not very good.

It happened on the very day for which so many preparations had been made that Mr. Goodbody was called away on business from which he could not return till late in the evening, so that he was not able to meet his niece at the train at the appointed time. Thomas drove Robin Gray with the phaeton to the station, and Charlie followed with the old pony and the tax-car for luggage. He was full of curiosity about young Master St. George, for he took a boy's interest in a boy.

At the first glance he was disappointed to see a

pale, rather puny child about ten years old keeping very close to the tall widow lady who greeted Thomas on the platform; but when he caught sight of the lady's face, he could hardly take his eyes off it again, for she was the most beautiful person he had ever seen.

She asked Thomas, with tears in her eyes, how her uncle did, and whether he was much changed, and afterwards asked about Mrs. Jennings and some other people. Then she drew the little fellow forward, saying,—

“This is my boy, Thomas. He is rather small and delicate, but I feel he will soon grow and get strong at the old place.—Artie dear, this is Thomas, an old friend of mother's.”

Artie put his hand into Thomas's, looking up in his face; and Charlie saw that the shy, pale child was really very like his beautiful mother. Then Thomas and Charlie got the luggage into the tax-car, and they all drove home.

Mr. Goodbody had arrived just before them, and Charlie saw the beautiful lady fall sobbing on the old gentleman's neck, while he folded his arms round her, soothing her tenderly. He had been lonely for want of his adopted daughter ever since she had left him.

In the days which followed, Arthur St. George quickly made friends with our “odd boy.” English life was still strange to him, so that he was con-

tinually questioning Charlie about things which were familiar to the latter. And as Charlie answered like the shrewd, sensible little lad that he was, Master Artie soon conceived a profound respect for his superior knowledge, but still more for his hardiness and bodily strength. The little stranger's admiration for these qualities was almost unbounded; for it must be confessed he was himself sadly deficient in them,—a natural result of having been reared in a hot climate, where children of English parents are exposed to so much danger as to be the cause of unceasing anxiety and watchfulness.

As the weather grew colder, Artie—himself somewhat of a hot-house plant—became very fond of resorting to the conservatory, which he declared was the only comfortable place in England, and he would have spent hours there had it not been forbidden as being hurtful to him.

Then everybody in the house had orders to encourage him to take exercise; and Charlie was not at all unwilling, while teaching Master Arthur to whip tops and drive hoops, to have a good excuse for indulging in what had been a short time ago favourite pastimes with himself, but which he regarded as very much beneath the dignity of his present position if pursued on his own account.

Master Arthur, however, with the usual perversity of human nature, quickly tired of these amusements, and took much more kindly to playing at Charlie's

work. Mr. Goodbody, when he saw this, bought him a light set of garden tools, and the child was perpetually asking either Thomas or Charlie to show him how to use them, setting about the work with a serious determination that was sure to tell in the end, though the beginning was feeble and awkward enough.

There was one strong bond of sympathy between the stout and hardy young British gardener and the delicate little foreign-reared gentleman, and that was their great love of animals. Arthur never tired of telling Charlie about the strange pets he had had in his old home, and the brilliant birds and reptiles that had there been familiar to him; and Charlie would speak lovingly of the sober-plumed singing birds that make our own gardens musical in summer. He showed nests in which young birds had been reared last season, and described what kind of eggs had been in each, and which bird had laid them. He pointed out the much-loved robin-redbreasts that hop so familiarly around the gardener's spade, watching for worms; and he told his companion of the cuckoo that visits our woods in the sweet early summer, and the swallows that had gone to find their winter quarters just before Master Arthur came.

Then Arthur shivered a little, and said *he* would like to be a swallow; at which Charlie opened his eyes very wide, and said,—

"Why, Master Arthur?"

"Because I am sure it is nice here in summer. And then when it gets cold like this—and you tell me it will be still colder—the swallows have gone to some nice sunshiny place, and I think they are right. I would go too if I had wings."

"Why, Master Artie, if you was to go with the swallows, you'd miss the jolliest time in the whole year; and you wouldn't have no Christmas, nor no sliding, nor snowballing, nor nothing. It ain't rightly cold yet at all. Wait till the frost and snow comes, and you'll say it's real jolly."

But poor little Arthur could not all at once take this view of a British winter. The thought of weather becoming what Charlie called rightly cold was little short of terrible to him. He looked as if he was going to cry.

"When that time comes," he said, "I'll not stir out of the house. I'll just get Sally to make me a big fire, and sit by it all day."

"Now, Master Arthur, you just don't you be a babby, nor an old woman neither, for you're a boy by rights, and you've got to grow a man, and you'd never be a man rightly if you was to sit by the fire. I'll tell you what, when there's snow you an' me'll make a snow-man at the gate; an' we'll pelt one another with snowballs; an' we'll go a slidin' on the pond—Thomas says as there's jolly slidin' on our pond in winter; and if master's

pleased with you—if you give over being a babby—I shouldn't wonder if he should buy you a pair of skates. I heard him a-telling Thomas as he'd spare nothin' to make you hardy-like."

"Skates!" repeated the little foreigner, with a very indistinct idea of the use of those instruments of pleasure. "I suppose that would be very nice. Have you skates, Charlie?"

"No, Master Arthur, not likely. How should I get skates? I never had money to spend on things like that."

"Well, if uncle gets me a pair I could lend them to you, you know, if it is any fun."

"Isn't it fun, just!"

"Oh, you know I've never seen ice except in blocks for cooling things, so I don't know. But I shouldn't think I could like it much. Isn't it very cold; and don't people fall on it sometimes and hurt themselves a good deal?"

Charlie could not forbear laughing at this.

"O Master Artie, ain't you ashamed to talk like that? But it's all along of that hot country you've been in, where they makes regular mollies of all the boys. When you've been a while here you won't care much about a hack or a scratch. Ain't I half my time a-cuttin' and a-hurtin' of myself; and it don't do me no harm," said Charlie, exhibiting his brown and somewhat dirty hands, on which there appeared, in various stages of healing, the

marks of such scars as hardy English boys are seldom wholly free from. "I'll tell you what it is," he continued, "skating's just the jolliest thing in the world, and you'll not mind the cold weather a bit—not when you've got a reg'lar winter rig-out, which they'll be sure to get you. *I'm* to have one this year, for master's given mother my wages; and mother she's a-gettin' me such a stunnin' lot o' warm clothes, I'd like to see the frost I'd care for when I've got *them* on. And do you know—but you mustn't tell this, for it's a secret—master's goin' to give *me* next month's wages just afore Christmas, an' I'm to give mother a Christmas-box. Mother don't know it yet. It's to be a gown or a shawl, I think; and Mrs. Jennings'll choose it."

"Oh, that will be nice for you, Charlie. I wish I could give mamma a real Christmas-box like that; but I've got no money except what either she or uncle gives me, for a present, you know; and it seems so odd to buy a present for any one with the money they've given you. I've done it, to be sure, but it doesn't seem a right kind of present, does it?"

"No, that it don't; but you can't help it, Master Artie. You're too small to have any money except what's given you," said Charlie, with a gratifying sense of being older than the boy he was talking to.

"Then I suppose you weren't able to earn any when you were my age."

"Oh, to be sure, I used to go errands, and that when I weren't no bigger than what you are. But you see you're a young gentleman, and that makes all the difference."

"Yes, I suppose it does," said Arthur with a sigh. "Isn't it rather a bother to be a gentleman?"

Charlie's only answer was a hearty laugh.

"Would you like to be a gentleman, then?" continued the little lad. "*I don't.*"

"Why, Master Artie, I don't know as I ever thought about liking it. I couldn't never be one, you know. But I'm sure it's much finer to be a gentleman like master nor a groom like Thomas Fair."

"Oh yes; when you're grown up perhaps it is, because then you can do what you like; but I mean when you're a boy. Now I think you have got twice as good times as I have; and you're twice as strong, and what people call hardy. You don't mind cold or wet, or getting knocked about, and soiling your hands, or hurting yourself, or anything that people here are always scolding me for minding; and no one calls *you* a 'baby' or an 'old woman.'"

"But, Master Artie, don't *be* it, and people won't call you it, *I say.*"

"Oh, I don't think I can help it. And then you are able to earn money and give presents to your mother, and I shan't be able to do that for *ever* so long. I've got such a lot of things to learn first.

O Charlie, if you knew all the lessons I shall have to learn you'd pity me really."

Charlie did not express any very deep sympathy. Perhaps he scarcely took in the nature of the hardship.

"I wonder now," continued Arthur, looking up at his companion,—for to the delicate, sensitive little fellow, so conscious of his own defects, Charlie seemed the ideal of all a boy should be,—“I wonder, if you were in my place, what you'd do—about the lessons, I mean."

"Well, I'm sure I don't know. I suppose your lessons is dreadful hard; but I thinks as I'd just begin an' learn 'em, an' when I'd done enough for one day I wouldn't bother about any more till 'twas time to do it."

This was really a very sensible suggestion, and Arthur had plenty of time to consider it, for at this moment Thomas's voice was heard calling sharply to Charlie to ask why he hadn't finished what he was about; so the "odd boy" turned to his work with renewed diligence, and Arthur ran off to meet his uncle, who just then came in sight. Mr. Goodbody was soon intrusted with his little grand-nephew's views as to the superior advantages of an "odd boy's" life over that of a young gentleman. He did not dispute the point at all, for he believed there really was something in what the child said. He saw that this petted little fellow whom everybody

wished to please, and from whom nothing was required beyond certain desultory lessons with his mother—which might be omitted on the slightest pretext—wandered about all day with his time hanging heavily on his hands, and that he was far less contented, and had less enjoyment of life, than the boy whose hearty play was earned by honest labour, and who felt himself to be, as he really was, useful both to his mother and to his employer. He resolved, therefore, that without further delay Arthur should be set steadily to work at the studies which must fit him for his future duties. But Arthur could by no means see that this was a remedy for the disparity he complained of between the young gardener's lot and his own; and though he was willing enough to please his uncle, yet it was with a dismal face that he greeted Charlie a day or two afterwards.

"O Charlie," said he, "do you know I am to have a *real* teacher next week!"

"And ain't you glad, Master Artie?"

"N—no. Why should I be glad, Charlie?"

"You was a-tellin' me you had such lots o' things to learn afore you was growed up, I should think you'd be glad to begin at 'em so as not to have 'em comin' on you all of a heap like."

"I didn't think of that; but you see I'm afraid this teacher will be so dreadfully particular, and I'll have to get my lessons done for him at a cer-

tain time every day whether I'm inclined for them or not; and then, perhaps, I shan't be able to do them well after all; and then— Did you ever go to school, Charlie?"

"Yes, when I was a little chap, afore I was able to work, I went to school. I was sorry to leave off too, I was."

"You liked it, then?"

"Yes; I liked some of the lessons, and some o' the books we got to read was real jolly—them as told about foreign parts, and wild beasts, and woods, and whales, and icebergs; and them as told about admirals and generals, and what they did."

"Oh, I like books of that kind too, and I'll lend you any I have with pleasure, if you'd like them."

"Thank you, Master Arthur; I'd be real glad now the nights is gettin' long."

"But, Charlie, weren't there other lessons at your school?"

"Yes, there was others; but not such a lot as you've got, I think. Poor boys don't go to school for long, so there ain't no use in teachin' them a lot o' things."

"And were they—were they *dreadfully* particular,—about the lessons, I mean?"

"Why, they was partic'lar, of course; but I don't remember as 'twas drefful—leastways I never got no wollopin', nor nothin', though I mind there was others as caught it sometimes."

This was the point on which Arthur really desired information, but he could not bring himself to ask it directly. The vagueness of his ideas on the subject made it seem something too dreadful to speak of. He only looked painfully anxious.

"If that's what you're afraid of, Master Artie," continued Charlie, "you needn't, I think, 'cause if you do your best they won't wollop you, unless it's by mistake, and *then* you needn't care about it. To be sure, I often heard as young gentlemen got a deal more wollopin' at their schools nor what poor boys do. I suppose that's because they have more to learn."

Now neither the fact stated nor the reason assigned for it was at all soothing to poor Arthur's fears. He sighed, and looked more dismal than ever.

"I wonder," he said, "*why* we need learn so much more?"

Charlie could not help him to a solution of this question.

"You really know a good deal without all that fuss—at least, you know a great many things I don't know; though, to be sure—"

"To be sure *what*, Master Artie?"

"I think, perhaps, it would be rather rude to say what I was going to say."

Charlie looked up from his weeding with a broad grin on his good-humoured face.

"Say it, Master Artie. I don't mind."

"I was going to say," said Arthur blushing, "that I wouldn't like to talk just the way you do. You *do* speak such bad English, Charlie."

"I don't say no bad words," said Charlie quickly.

"Oh no! I don't mean that. But you say such *queer* things. You say, 'you was,' and 'I ain't,' and 'a-goin',' and 'a-comin',' for 'going' and 'coming.' And you don't seem to remember that two negatives in English destroy each other. Thomas talks the same way, and so does Sally, partly. Mrs. Jennings is not so bad, but she does it a little too."

Charlie laughed good-humouredly. "I don't know nothin' about them two 'niggers,' or whatever you calls 'em. Of course, I know that me nor Thomas don't talk exactly like you, nor master, nor your mamma; but I couldn't talk no different, I think, if I tried; and it's all one so long as folks knows what I mean."

"But you have no idea how odd it sounds. Just fancy if uncle was to begin saying, 'a-goin',' and 'a-comin',' and 'you didn't ought,' and such things."

"It *would* sound droll if master was to begin talkin' like Thomas. That's just what I say, you know. You've got to be a gentleman when you're growed up, and I haven't; so you and me can't always do just the same things. And a-talkin' won't weed this here bed, however you do it. And

Thomas will be a-talkin' to me if it's not done afore dark ; an' he won't talk like master neither."

After this specimen Arthur began to think it really *was* hopeless to try to correct Charlie's English. He did not understand why such a clever boy couldn't do better in this particular, but supposed it was owing to his own indifference about it, so he merely said,—

"Well, Charlie, I won't delay you any longer ; and I suppose you'll never speak more correctly if you don't care to do it. But I really wish you'd try."

But that incorrigible Charlie only grinned again, as if the matter were the best joke in the world.

CHAPTER VII.

WINTER DAYS.

THE winter months were passing happily on, bringing many healthy pleasures to the various members of Mr. Goodbody's household. The genial old man, delighting to make every one happy, seemed to catch a kind of reflection of boyish enjoyment from the frolics of his little nephew; for Arthur improved rapidly, not only in health and spirits, but in such boyish virtues as his want of health and spirits had hitherto made him deficient in.

The tutor, whose advent the timid little fellow had looked forward to with so much apprehension, proved to be a most delightful and valuable acquaintance—ready to help and advise in many matters which concern boys deeply, but of which Mr. Goodbody confessed his own experiences were so long past that he could hardly give an opinion about them.

The dreaded lessons were found to be quite possible of accomplishment, for Arthur was a most

intelligent boy ; and the regular work, which he might on no account omit, gave him an enjoyment of his playtime unknown in the old desultory days.

It must be confessed that the companionship of our hardy little Charlie had something to do with the improvement in the little gentleman. Nor was the benefit all on one side, for Charlie unconsciously picked up certain courteous and gentle ways which the kindness of his nature disposed him to ; and greatly to Arthur's relief, the reading of well-written books, and talking a good deal with educated people, improved his manner of speaking to a considerable extent, though I must admit that he is likely to be to the end of his life far from perfect in this particular.

There was one subject in which both Arthur and Charlie soon learned to take a keen interest, and in which their opportunities of acquiring knowledge were pretty equal. This was natural history. Both boys were observant of nature, and both had a tenderness towards all living things which inclined them to this study. Fortunately, Mr. Stewart, Arthur's tutor, was himself an enthusiastic naturalist, and believing the subject to be one of endless pleasure, he encouraged the taste for it in his young pupil. One day, when he was able to spend more time than usual with Arthur, he brought his microscope, and was proceeding to point out some of the wonders revealed by it, when the boy asked if he might

fetch Charlie to share the pleasure. Receiving permission, he went in search of the young gardener. One plunge of his clay-stained hands under the water-tap and a vigorous rubbing of his feet on the mat was all the preparation there was time for, and Charlie shyly entered the schoolroom, soon to forget his shyness in the wonder and pleasure of what he saw.

After this introduction, Mr. Stewart, as he passed through the grounds, often spoke to Charlie; and when the spring had come, and the birds were beginning to build, he one day had a long conversation with him on the subject of nests and some of the habits of our common birds. Finding how much the little fellow had already learned by simply making use of his eyes, the tutor gave him an easy book of natural history, from which he said he had himself got his first knowledge of the subject.

The book was far from new when Charlie received it, for Mr. Stewart had had it from his boyhood, but it is in Charlie's possession still. When I saw it the leaves were all thickened and soiled, and the printing was nearly worn off in some places; but he will never part with it, for that gift was the beginning of a pursuit that has been one of his greatest pleasures. He has been obliged to make good use of this book, for he has had but few; and beyond what he has read in this one, his own honest brown eyes have taught him nearly all

he has learned, and yet he is no mean authority on the subject now, I assure you.

This, however, happened in the spring, and I have yet to tell you about the winter.

During the Christmas holidays hard frost set in, and in a few days not only the pond at Mr. Goodbody's, but the canal at the other side of the town, had ice strong enough to bear far heavier skaters than Charlie and Arthur.

Just as Charlie had foretold, Mr. Goodbody, pleased with the improvement in his little nephew, bought the boy a beautiful pair of small skates; and at the same time Thomas looked out a pair that he had used himself in his younger days, and, without saying a word to any one, polished them up and got the straps fitted to Charlie's boot. Great was the satisfaction of our young friend on receiving this most unexpected gift, and marvellous was his progress in the art of skating during the very first day he had them on. To be sure, it was not achieved without a few falls; but of these, as you may suppose, Charlie did not make much. He had a great deal of holiday time at this period, partly because during the frost there was little to be done in the grounds, and also when Master Arthur chose to take exercise on the ice some one must be there to take care of him. Of course, the skating was mainly practised on the pond at home; but one day Mr. Goodbody took Arthur to a

place at some distance where several excellent skaters were performing, and Charlie went with them.

"I am so glad you have got skates, Charlie," said good-natured little Arthur as they were driving home, "because you get on so splendidly, and you enjoy it so much."

"It's prime!" said Charlie with fervour. "Last winter, Master Arthur, I was as near fretting because I couldn't have a pair; only I thought 'twould be stupid to fret about that when I'd got such lots of things, you know."

"What lots of things had you? Were you rich last winter, Charlie?"

"Oh no, Master Artie; that was afore I came to master's. But I mean lots of things compared with what some other people had. I'd got pretty fair clothes, you know; and I always had *some* kind o' victuals—not like what we've got at master's, of course, but I weren't never without."

"But every one must have *some* sort of 'victuals,' as you call them; people couldn't live without eating, you know."

"Yes; but there's lots of people nigh starved with hunger every day, especially this hard weather when many men is out of work; and then they've got to sell their clothes, and they haven't got no blankets nor fire nor nothing. I weren't never that way."

"O Charlie," said Arthur, dismayed at this first revelation that had come into his luxurious little life of the woes of poverty, "how can people live that way?"

"They've got to do it, Master Arthur, some way. To be sure, it's hard," said Charlie coolly enough.

He was not a bit less kind-hearted than Arthur, but he had known these facts so long that he was not disturbed by them, neither did hardship appear quite so terrible to him as it did to his companion. Instances of this kind of suffering were not unfamiliar to him, and he now related some of them, little dreaming of their effect upon the sensitive little fellow beside him.

Arthur made no remark—afraid indeed to speak, lest some trembling in his voice should betray the tears that the gathering darkness concealed. He had lately begun to feel ashamed of tears. Tears such as these, however, are not unmanly; and if the pity which brings them to the eyes does not all flow away with them, but remains to produce kind and helpful acts, they soften the heart and do a great deal of good.

From that day little Arthur thought less of the small trials and hardships of his own life and more of the wants of other people. The immediate effect of the pity that filled his young heart was to make him a little grave and silent in the evening when he joined his mother and uncle after their dinner.

Mr. Goodbody noticed this, and asked him whether he had not enjoyed his day. Arthur said he had; and then it all came out what he had been thinking of. Somehow people *did* very often tell their thoughts to Mr. Goodbody.

The old gentleman did not like to see his little nephew sad, and yet he was not sorry that the boy's thoughts had begun to be occupied with the wants of his neighbour; so he told him some of his own plans for helping those poor people who suffered so much from the ceasing of work and wages during this hard weather. Before the evening was over, the child began to inquire what he could do to help, and to devise plans, which he talked over with his uncle. And this was just what Mr. Goodbody wanted.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FREE BREAKFAST.

Now all the world cannot be enjoying itself together, and every one is not happy and prosperous at the same time. In your gayest hours you may be sure that there are plenty of people not very far off whose hearts are heavy and sad, and who are struggling with some of the many kinds of sorrow that are in the world.

I tell you this, not because I want at all to shade the brightness of your young life, or to make one of your pleasures less sweet to you, but to warn you against thinking that because you are glad and happy, your brother must be glad and happy too, and that you have nothing to do but enjoy yourself and leave his concerns alone; for then you would be like a certain rich man we read of in the Bible, who was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day, and gave, it would appear, no thought to the wants and sufferings of a person who was very near him, and who might have saved

him from getting hardened and ruined with that terrible selfishness, if only he had taken the lesson to heart. And it may well be that one of the uses of all the sorrow that is in the world is to save people from this sin of selfishness—a sin which we know God hates. I have said *one* of the uses; for we may be sure our Father in heaven has reasons for allowing it that we cannot even guess at, much less try to explain. But if you like this story well enough to read it very attentively, I think you will find out what I believe is another of its uses.

The cold weather lasted long that year, and those frosty days that the boys under Mr. Goodbody's roof found all too short for their happy work and their boyish fun were a weary time to many in the town that was so near them. Certain works upon which numbers of labourers were employed were for several weeks discontinued; and this, combined with other causes, brought many poor people to a very destitute condition indeed.

Mr. Goodbody and some persons who were like-minded formed various plans by which these sufferings were diminished. Among other helpful things they provided on Sunday morning a breakfast for several hundreds. To this free breakfast many poor persons, and some very rough and ignorant ones, found their way, sad and weary, and came away refreshed in body and mind; for Mr. Goodbody could not rest satisfied with merely providing

a warm and comfortable meal, welcome as that was to these poor people. He knew that the minds and souls of men are often weary and hungry too, and he determined that some wholesome food should at least be offered to them. This was how it was managed :—As soon as the hungry people had taken their places in the large hall, and had been supplied with food, a well-trained little choir sang some simple hymns to pleasing tunes, giving the words as distinctly as possible. One hymn, which was set to a very easy tune, was printed on a great sheet and hung up in front of the platform, so that it might be read by every one in the room. When all had finished their meal, they were invited to join in singing a few verses of this hymn. After this Mr. Goodbody gave a short address, choosing a plain text, which also he had printed in very large letters. Then there was a short prayer; and while the people were dispersing, the choir sang hymns again.

Charlie had to be up bright and early on these mornings, to go with Thomas to the hall, where they must get fires lighted and tea made in the great boilers before the people began to come in. It was quite dark when they set out, and indeed for some time after they arrived; and before daybreak on a January morning is a cold time, I can tell you. But in his new winter clothes Charlie did not much mind the cold. He worked hard at the boilers with Thomas; and then they and the other people who

were helping had to get a hasty breakfast, and be ready by eight o'clock to receive the people at the door.

One morning while he was thus engaged, and just as he was putting portions of bread and meat into the hands of two pinched and blue-looking little children, he thought he saw a face which was familiar to him pass in at the other side. Before he could look again, this person had disappeared in the crowd. Almost immediately afterwards he had to help in bringing in the tea. Certain benches were allotted to him to keep supplied, and there was no familiar face among the people who occupied them.

Mr. Goodbody had expressed a wish that a few persons who could sing would disperse themselves among the guests so as to encourage them to join in the general hymn. Accordingly, when the tea had been served, Charlie took his place in a gallery at the far end of the building. From thence he looked down into the body of the hall, and there among the people most distant from the platform, sick-looking, lean, and ragged, sat Tom Bent. He was dressed in a soiled and worn sailor's shirt, and his shoes and trowsers seemed to be in a very bad condition. He had the air of a person who wished to escape observation. He rose with the rest when the hymn, "Just as I am," was raised, though he made no attempt to join in the singing. But when Mr. Goodbody came forward, and, pointing to his

text, repeated, "When the wicked man turneth from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive," then Tom raised his eyes and fixed them on the speaker, endeavouring, at the same time, to draw himself more into the shadow of the pillar than before.

Mr. Goodbody's words were not many. He told those ignorant people of Him whom we have been taught to call "Our Father who art in heaven." How the Great Father's will is that people may be good, and how he has sent message after message into the world to persuade them to it. How there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repents; and that repenting means just the same as what is in the text—the wicked man turning from his wickedness. How, in order that goodness might be possible to us, the righteous Jesus, the Son of God, gave himself to suffer, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God. And how God now calls upon men, commanding and urging them to repent, not only in the words he has caused to be written for our learning, but in other ways. Even all the pain and sorrow and suffering that is in the world is just a message to people to be good, because it all has something to do with sin. Not that the people who sin most always suffer most—that is not true; but it all has something to do with sin, for when at last Jesus shall have taken away all sin from out of

his kingdom, and there shall be a new heaven and a new earth, wherein dwelleth *righteousness*, there shall be no sorrow there. But now what each one has to do is to hear God's call, and to turn from his wickedness that he has committed; and for each one desiring to do this, Jesus is ever the Friend of sinners, able and ready to deliver them out of the sins that they themselves have no strength to leave, and to bring them to God, who to his repenting children is a tender Father, into whose presence they may freely come and be happy there.

Charlie did not listen to this address so attentively as he sometimes listened to such words, and for this reason, he was watching Tom all the time, wondering why he had come there, and where he had been, and how he had got into such a sorry case. He felt a good deal of curiosity about him, curiosity which was changed to pity when the people rose to go out, and he observed that Tom shuffled along painfully with the help of a stick, and looked very ill indeed. Something, however, kept him back from trying to meet his old acquaintance at the door,—partly, I think, a natural dislike to encountering one who had always made himself disagreeable, and partly a feeling that Tom wished to escape observation.

An hour or two later Mr. Goodbody and Arthur were standing on the gravel in front of the house waiting for Mrs. St. George to set out for morning

church. Charlie was not going to church this morning; it was his turn to stay and keep the place. He had leave to visit his mother as soon as he had dined, and he should go to church with her in the afternoon. Seeing his master, he touched his cap, and said,—

“Please, sir, that there Tom Bent was at the breakfast this morning.”

“Indeed! what sort of appearance had he?”

Charlie described his wretched condition.

“How was it you couldn’t speak to him?”

“I didn’t try, sir.”

“I am surprised at that. He seems to be in a very sad state. You might have been able to help him.”

“Please, sir, I didn’t see,—that is, I didn’t know as I had any particular call to help him.”

“From what you say I should think he looked as if he had need of a friend.”

“That he did, sir.”

“And there are not many to befriend him, I am afraid. It is very doubtful whether even his father will do anything for him. Poor, sick, and friendless, that is call enough to any of us to show some feeling for him.”

“Please, sir, I was sorry to see him so shook like, but I didn’t think—that is—”

“You didn’t think! that’s it exactly—a very common fault of boys, and of men too, indeed, but one that in your case I hope will mend. Well, now, I

want you to do a little thinking. Where is your Bible? I wish to show you the lesson we shall have this evening."

"I'll fetch it, sir," said Charlie, and in a few minutes he returned with it.

"I will mark the passage for you," said Mr. Goodbody, opening the book. "I would like both you and Arthur to read the whole carefully before you come to me in the evening, and tell me what you think is the meaning of this last verse. See, I have put a pencil-mark before it."

"Thank you, sir," said Charlie, as he went off with the book.

"Uncle," said Arthur, "who is this person you were speaking of? is he a friend of Charlie's?"

"Scarcely that. The fact is, he has been, I am afraid, a very bad boy. He has hardly had a chance of being anything else. His parents are not good people. Some months ago, just before you came here, he got into trouble,—Charlie will tell you all about it if you care to hear the story,—and at that time he seemed inclined to mend his ways. He would have done so, I think, if his father had not turned against him—refused to receive him, indeed, because he had been in jail, though, as it happened, *that* was through a mistake. He then went off, and we heard no more of him. Now he has turned up again, and in a very sad state it seems.—But here comes your mother, and it is time to start."

In the evening, when Mrs. Bright was preparing tea, Alice said, "What has your master given you for this evening, Charlie?"

Alice took a great interest in the Bible lessons that Mr. Goodbody gave the young people, and on Sunday afternoons she generally went over the subject with her brother.

"It's about the man as fell among thieves," answered Charlie; "and master he wants us to say what we think is the meaning of the last verse, just what he's marked at the end."

"Which is that?" said Alice, turning over Charlie's Bible. "He's only marked just five words, 'Go and do thou likewise;' that's like the man as had pity for t'other one, I suppose. What are you going to say, Charlie?"

"That's what I don't know; and yet it don't seem a hard question. What would you say if you was asked?"

"I don't quite know," said Alice; "let's read it over. Where do you begin? Oh, I see! Here, I suppose, 'And behold a certain lawyer—'" She read it all through, and paused thoughtfully.

"Do you know," said Charlie, "I'm nearly sure as 'twas along of what I told him about seein' Tom that master gave us those verses. Master thought I didn't ought to let him pass without speaking to him; but you see Tom's a surly sort of a fellow, not exactly the pleasantest to talk to,

and there weren't never such great love between him an' me."

"That makes the verses suit all the better," said Alice. "There's more about them Samaritans in another place. It says that t'other ones hadn't no dealings with them. I heard the parson talking of that once. There wasn't any great love between them,—just like you and Tom, you know."

"Ye—es," said Charlie thoughtfully; "and to be sure Tom looked nigh half-dead this morning. But all the same, what could I do? I hadn't got no 'beast' to put him on, nor no money to give folks for tending him, nor no stuff that would cure him like the oil and wine, you know, in the verses."

"No," said Alice, "that you hadn't; but perhaps you did ought to have talked to him; perhaps your master meant that when you took no heed you were like the 'priest' and the 'Levite' in the verses. You know one of them 'looked at him,' like you looked at Tom this morning, and yet he never offered to do nothing, only passed by on the other side. You shouldn't like to do so, should you?"

"No," said Charlie thoughtfully, "that I shouldn't."

"And them words that your master has marked, 'Go and do thou likewise,' that's what Jesus said, you know; and you wouldn't like not to do what *he* said. I know I shouldn't."

"No," said Charlie, more thoughtfully still; "no more should I."

"Children," called Mrs. Bright, "come and have your tea. It's 'most time Charlie was on his way home, and right slippery the streets is to-night.—You'll have to be careful, child, or you'll break some of your bones. Look out for the slides and keep off them."

"I'll do the best I can," said Charlie laughing. "I don't want to break my bones surely; but you can't see your way very well to-night—there's a kind o' fog like, and the lamps don't show light very far."

"So there is," said Mrs. Bright. "I shouldn't be surprised if the frost were breaking up; that'll make it all the more slippery at first. Be careful, child."

And good need there was to be careful, as Charlie found when he went out. It was six o'clock and quite dark; the raw cold of a thaw was in the air, and the lights looked sickly through the fog. The trodden surface of the snow just beginning to melt was more slippery than ever, and bitterly cold to the feet. Charlie felt it though he had stout shoes and thick woollen socks, and plenty of warm red blood running through his veins. He had turned out of the court and reached the third lamp-post in the street outside, when he heard a terrible fit of coughing, and then a groan as of some one in pain. It seemed to come from a man who was leaning against the lamp-post. Charlie went round to look at his face.

"Why, Tom!" he exclaimed, "you seem dreadful bad, so you do. Wherever are you stopping, Tom? You didn't ought to be outside to-night surely."

"I ain't stopping nowheres," said Tom with a groan. "I'll be dead afore morning, I believe."

"Have you been to your father's? He can't refuse to let you in."

"I don't know where they be gone. I never meant to go near them again; but when I were took so bad this afternoon, and 'twas too late to try for to go into the hospital, I went to the old place, and they're left that."

"So they are. I don't know where they're gone neither. But you can't stay here, Tom; you'd die."

"There ain't no other place. It's all one," said Tom despairingly; "I suppose I should die anyhow."

"Whatever is the matter with you, Tom?"

"Rheumatics; it's orful," said Tom, and groaned again.

"I'll tell you what," said Charlie: "you come round to mother's with me—'tain't but a step—and you can stop there to-night, I think; and master he'll see and get you into an hospital to-morrow, and you'll get well, Tom. Folks don't die of rheumatics, I'm sure."

"I dunno," said Tom; "I wish I was dead anyhow. And I can't go to your mother's. What call

has she to let me in? and mayhap she wouldn't neither."

"She will—I'm sure she will—and you can't stay here. Come along, Tom."

And Charlie took hold of the sick lad's arm. That arm had often been a terror to the younger boy, but it was feeble enough now, and racked with pain.

Tom made no further objection, but tottered along leaning upon his companion's shoulder. In the doorway Charlie left him while he ran up to his mother's room and called Alice out.

"Alice," said he, "have you got the bed as I used to sleep on afore I went to place?"

"Yes, to be sure; it's there in the closet where you used to sleep. We've taken the blankets on to our own bed since the weather got cold, but the bed's there. Whatever do you want with it?"

"Couldn't Tom Bent sleep in it to-night? He's below in the doorway, bad with rheumatics, and nowheres but the street to stop in."

"I don't know," said Alice a little startled; "I don't know what mother would say to it."

"He's awful bad," said Charlie; "and master would get him took to hospital to-morrow, I'm sure."

"We'll ask mother," said Alice.

Mrs. Bright hesitated. What could she do if the sick boy were left on her hands? *she* would not be able to keep him. Charlie said he thought there

was no danger of that; his master would be sure to see at once about having him taken to hospital. So Mrs. Bright consented, and they got Tom upstairs.

Charlie waited till the patient had been laid in bed and covered up with anything they could spare for him, and then he hurried home as fast as he could. He was just giving Mrs. Jennings an account of how he had been detained when the library bell was rung. "That's for you, Charlie," said Sally, so he took his Bible and went upstairs.

Mr. Goodbody was sitting at a table with a reading-lamp on it, and a large Bible open before him. Arthur was standing beside him.

"Well, my lads," said the old gentleman when all was ready, "have you read over these verses carefully?"

"Yes, uncle," said Arthur.

"Yes, sir," said Charlie.

"How much of them can you say by heart?"

Arthur repeated the two verses beginning at—"Which now of these three thinkest thou was neighbour unto him that fell among thieves?"

Charlie repeated the whole parable from—"A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho."

"And what do you think is the meaning of those words, 'Go and do thou likewise'? Have you thought about them?—What do you say, Arthur?"

"Please, uncle, I think it means to have pity for

people that are miserable, and to help them, just as you do, uncle."

"What do you say, Charlie?"

"Please, sir, I think it means, for one thing, that I didn't ought to have taken no heed to Tom this morning when he looked so bad."

"A good answer, Charlie, a very practical answer. I like a practical answer."

"Now you should have observed that this story, which we call the parable of the good Samaritan, was given in answer to a question. What is the question that it answers?"

"'Who is my neighbour?'" said Charlie.

"And for what purpose did this lawyer ask the question, 'Who is my neighbour?'"

"Please, sir, it doesn't say."

"Yes it does.—Read the twenty-ninth verse, Arthur."

"'And he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour?' He asked because he was 'willing to justify himself.' I don't know what that means, uncle."

"Wishing to justify himself—that is, to show that his own conduct had been right. You see he had just shown that God's law required him to love his neighbour as himself. Now if he could find that 'thy neighbour' had a very narrow meaning—that is, if it meant only such persons as were very near to him, his own family, or at most the people who

had always been on friendly terms with him—perhaps he could have shown that he had not greatly failed in this duty. Probably he thought it would be a difficult matter to determine who was meant by ‘thy neighbour.’ I am sure he never dreamt it could mean any one outside his own nation, least of all a Samaritan.”

Mr. Goodbody then went on to explain, at greater length than I could write it in a story-book, who these Samaritans were, and why they were so unfriendly, for the most part, with the Jews who dwelt so near them. And he showed the boys some pictures of the lonely country where the traveller fell among thieves, and where the people from whom he might naturally claim help passed him by. He also told them something about the “inns” and the way of travelling in those parts.

“And now, boys,” he said in conclusion, “I want you to consider the greatest, the highest example we have of this spirit of love and compassion extending itself to strangers, even to enemies. Turn to the fifth chapter of Romans, and I will read you the passage: ‘For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.’ That passage tells of deliverance from a condition as helpless and

far more sad than that of the man who lay stripped and wounded by the lonely Eastern wayside. But to return to our parable. Tell me in a few words—it is given here in five—what we may call the moral of the passage for you and me. What direction does it contain for us to regulate our conduct by?”

Both the boys answered—“‘Go and do thou likewise.’”

“Yes. Remember that. If you remember it practically our lesson has not been lost. Now you may go.”

But before Charlie left the room he told his master how it had come to pass that Tom Bent was lying sick under Mrs. Bright's care.

CHAPTER IX.

T O M ' S S T O R Y .

THERE was not much rest for poor Tom that night, for he was in the beginning of a rheumatic fever. He had a few short uneasy sleeps; at other times he lay moaning wearily. Sometimes when the pain was less he talked to Mrs. Bright, telling her about his life for the last few months, and this was the substance of what he said.

The night he left his native town he went by train to the nearest seaport, arriving in the morning with less than a shilling in his pocket. There, after some difficulty, he got a place in a collier bound for the west of Ireland. From the time he sailed he was a good deal troubled with what he called "flying pains"—indeed he had never been quite himself since the night of his ducking in the river—and on the return journey he became very unfit for work. He had embarked, however, with a very rough and hardened crew, and as long as he could stand or raise his arm he was obliged to

perform the duties for which he had been hired, and he met with blows and hard words when he failed.

At length, however, they arrived at the port from whence they had sailed. There he was discharged and paid; and he lay for some time in a lodging where he got rather better. But his money was soon exhausted; he was not fit to take another voyage, "and," he added bitterly, "I had no mind for it even if I was able."

Here there was a gap in Tom's story, and when he spoke again he told them that he had arrived penniless in his native town on Saturday morning, had taken shelter the following night in an empty cottage outside the town, and had had no food except what he got at the free breakfast on Sunday. In the afternoon illness and misery and the bitter cold drove him to seek his old home, only to find it occupied by strangers, his father gone, no one knew whither. It was just after that that Charlie met him, and he must have perished but for his timely aid. "But it's all one," he said bitterly. "You're a good woman, missus, and your son's a prime little chap. But it's all one to me. I hadn't no luck this long time, and I expect I shan't never have it again. You might as well have let me be."

Now, if Tom had had no intention of applying to his relations for help, why had he returned to his native town at all? That was just the part of the

story he had not told. Certainly where he was already known as a dishonest idler he was not more likely to obtain help or employment than he would be in a strange place. But the fact was, he was growing tired of his attempt to live honestly. The idea of regular daily toil was very distasteful to him, and he resolved to seek his old lawless employers, and either to offer them his services again, or by threats of getting them into trouble to compel them to give him money. The men, however, were not to be found. The affair of the robbery at the farm and the inquiries that followed had brought many things to light that made it desirable for them to change their place of abode, and so Tom found himself, in his sick and suffering condition, without any visible means of obtaining food or shelter.

When Thomas Fair came early on Monday to remove the sick lad to the infirmary, where Mr. Goodbody had secured his admission, he said little except to repeat his former observation that "'twere as good to let him be." A long and weary illness was before him. If a very small part of the care which he received during the months that followed had been bestowed on him at the time of his leaving home in October, he would probably have been as strong as ever before this time. There had been no care for him, however; and stout lad though he was, exposure and hardship had brought him to a miserable, shattered condition from which he

was not likely ever completely to recover. Notwithstanding the most skilful treatment, he had relapses, and went through various forms of rheumatic disease, so that it was long before he finally left the infirmary.

Friendless as he was with regard to his own family and his former companions, he was not without visits and inquiries from persons who took an interest in him. Every visiting day Mrs. Bright or Alice came to see how he did. Mr. Goodbody called often, for there were several patients in whom he was interested; and he always spoke a few cheering words to Tom. Charlie, too, was occasionally sent with little luxuries which his master took a pleasure in providing for the infirmary patients, and when allowed he spent a few minutes by Tom's bed. There was no one whose visits cheered the patient so much, or with whom he felt so much at home as he did with the good-natured little lad whom he had once so cordially hated.

During the first few weeks Tom was often delirious, and in his quiet intervals he was very weak. One day when Charlie had brought a basket of grapes for the patients, he went over very softly to see Tom, who was lying quite quiet with his eyes open, but not apparently taking notice of anything. He seemed at first not to recognize Charlie, but afterwards a degree of intelligence came into his face, and he asked,—

"What were them words as your master was talking about—them words in big letters?"

"When?" asked Charlie.

"I don't know; this morning mayhap," said Tom languidly. Charlie looked for an explanation towards a nurse who was passing.

"Oh, don't mind that," she said. "He's often out of his head, and patients like that take no count of time; likely he's thinking on something that happened before he came in."

But Tom asked again more urgently than before, "What was them words—them in big letters; some'at about a wicked man?"

Charlie knew now. It was more than a fortnight since Tom had heard Mr. Goodbody's address at the breakfast, but that was what he was thinking of. So Charlie repeated the words: "When the wicked man turneth from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive."

"Lawful," repeated the sick boy; "I done nothing unlawful, not since I broke with them men. There's none can say as I did. Not that them game-laws is anyways fair, however."

"O Tom, I don't think as it's them sort o' laws that's meant."

"What sort then?" said Tom fretfully. "How many sorts is there?"

"Master could tell you," said Charlie; "he'll tell

you all about it if you ask him. There," he continued, seeing that Tom had flushed and was becoming excited, "you keep quiet, Tom, and master he'll come soon and he'll tell you anything you want to know. See, here are some of the grapes; the nurse said I might give them to you," and Charlie placed one between Tom's lips. He received it with some signs of satisfaction, then he turned painfully on the other side and dozed off.

CHAPTER X.

CONSULTATIONS.

WHEN little Arthur St. George had learned all he could of Tom Bent's history, he began to take a great interest in him; and each time that Mr. Goodbody returned from visiting at the infirmary he questioned him closely as to the state of his patient. One day the old gentleman told his nephew that the doctors did not expect the lad would die, but that he would probably be a long time ill, and they thought it likely his limbs would never be very straight or strong again.

"And then, uncle," said Arthur, "if poor Tom becomes a good boy, and wants to be honest, how shall he be able to get his living?"

"That is a difficult question; but if Tom should really want to be honest, I hope we shall find a way of answering it."

"Oh, he will want to be honest, I am sure, uncle."

"Why do you think so?"

"His bad ways have got him into so much trouble he can't want to go on with them any more."

"Pain and trouble do not always make people wise, my dear."

"But, uncle, I have heard you say that is what it is for; that trouble belongs to bad ways, and if people will have one they must have the other too. And you know this is not as if some one was just telling him about it, because he might not listen to him or believe him; but now he *feels* it, and he must believe that."

"What you say is very true. You cannot separate bad ways from their punishment, except by repenting of them. And yet people sometimes believe, ay, and feel this, and know that they are going on to the terrible punishment of all unrepented sin, and the knowledge has no effect on them. The fact is, my boy, pain and punishment cannot change the heart, and all true repentance must begin there."

"Then isn't it any use, uncle?"

"Very often it is: very often it serves to make people sick of sin and long for something better; or it makes people afraid to offend, and the fear it puts into them is the 'beginning of wisdom.' I suppose all punishment is intended to be such a warning; but sometimes hearts are stubborn, and will not listen to it."

Arthur walked along silently after this, looking grave enough; but when they reached the door, and

his uncle was about to go in, he looked up brightly and said, "But after all, uncle, I'm nearly *sure* Tom is going to be good after this."

Mr. Goodbody smiled kindly. "I hope so," said he.

"And you know, uncle," continued the child, "I really want to find out what he could do to get his living honestly. I want to help him; for you see it is so hard for him to begin to be honest, and everything makes it so easy for me, I think I ought to help him."

The old gentleman put both his hands on Arthur's shoulders and looked at him fondly. "Yes, my boy," he said, "you ought. Think the matter over, and when you have found a way I will try to do what I can." And Mr. Goodbody passed into his study, and left Arthur standing meditatively on the gravel.

It was a showery day in February, blustering and cold, but Arthur was beginning not to feel the English winter weather so much as he did at first, and just now he was too much occupied with other matters to think of it. He was not at all sure that even his friend Charlie could help him much to find an honest calling for Tom. At all events, he thought it well first to consult a more experienced person, so he went to find Thomas.

Now, ever since the frost had broken up, Thomas and Charlie both had been hard at work getting the garden to rights and the ground ready for the early

sowings. At the moment that Arthur went to look for the gardeners they had just been summoned to their dinner, and Thomas was washing the clay from his hands under the water-tap in the stable-yard.

"Thomas," said Arthur, "how would you get your living if you had not full use of your limbs?"

Thomas looked a little startled at the question. "I'm thankful to say, Master Arthur," he replied, "I never had no call to think about it."

"Oh, I know you have not, and I am sure I hope you never shall have to think of it for yourself. But you know there are people so; and I want to know is there not any way they can get their living?"

"Yes, sir," said Thomas, rinsing his hands carefully, "there's many ways. I know a chap now as works at the shoemaking—a very honest man he is too, and a neat workman—and yet he couldn't walk from this to the door without a crutch, not since he was a boy; but that don't hurt his hands, you see. Shoemakin', however," said Thomas, as he turned off the water and proceeded to dry his hands on his red cotton handkerchief,—“shoemakin' takes some time to learn, and a chap has to pay mostly to learn the trade, and he don't make nothin' until he has some understandin' of it."

"Then that would not do at all; besides, I want to know of something that a person could do if perhaps one of his hands was crippled."

“ Well, Master Arthur, I can’t think of nothin’, leastways I can’t think of it this minute—unless it be somethin’ in the coster line.”

“ What is that ? ”

“ A coster is one of them chaps as goes round sellin’ articles—some sells fish, some sells green-groceries, and so on. Some has a barrow only, and some has a donkey and cart. I know chaps as makes a fairish sort o’ livin’ out of it ; but it’s uncertain, it is.”

“ But should not they have some money to set up in those sort of things ? ”

“ Why, yes, sir, *some* ; but it don’t cost so much. He needn’t lay in any great stock, you see, for such goods must be bought fresh every day. The chief thing is to make sure of customers, so as not to have goods left on his hands at a loss. A stout basket don’t cost much,—a barrow, of course, is something more costly ; but if he hadn’t good use of his legs, he couldn’t manage without a donkey and cart.”

“ Wouldn’t that cost a great deal ? ”

“ Pretty smartish ; but he’d make more with it. I knew a lame chap as got a loan of the price of a donkey and cart, and he paid it all off in a year, payin’ some every week. You see he was able to go out into the country and buy out of the cottage gardens, and he sold round about the town.”

With this Thomas went in to his dinner, and

Arthur took another turn round the garden, deep in thought, until his notice was attracted by some rooks building in the great elm-tree at the other side of the pond. How busy they were, and what a talk they made over it, as they flew to and fro, carrying twigs and straws to their building-place. Arthur thought he should like to be able to climb up and see how they were doing it, and he wondered if even nimble Charlie could get up there.

Charlie, however, was very busy these times, and had scarcely a minute to spare during the daylight. On this evening after his tea he sat down to his natural history book, which had been given him only that week. He had just got deep into a chapter on nests, when Sally told him that Master Arthur wanted him in the schoolroom.

This was nothing unusual, for almost all their boyish consultations were carried on there at the hour when Mr. Goodbody and his niece were at dinner.

Charlie went into the schoolroom, carrying his book with him. Master Arthur, however, was not ready for birds' nests at this moment. It was quite another matter he wished to talk over; and, as they could not hope for any help from books, Arthur had not even lighted the lamp. He had, however, stirred up the fire and seated himself on a stool before it, leaving another for his counsellor and confidant.

So Charlie sat down, and they talked over a

certain matter until they had said all they could think of about it; and then they went back to the beginning, and said the same things all over again; and if they had talked till morning, I don't think they would have got any nearer to a solution of the question than they did during the first five minutes.

CHAPTER XI.

THE FALL OF THE ELM.

THE wind rose that evening and blew hard all night, and though it grew calmer towards morning, yet there were violent gusts that made garden work impossible during a great part of the next day ; and in the evening it rose again and blew such a gale that no one in the house slept except Charlie. Next morning, when it had gone down considerably, Thomas went out to see if any harm had been done, and, behold ! the elm tree in which the rooks had been building lay along the ground, its roots torn up by the violence of the storm. Its topmost boughs were dipping in the pond, and among them were three rooks' nests, just completed. Two dead rooks were entangled among the branches, and a third lay floating on the pond.

Arthur had a good opportunity now of examining a rook's nest, so as soon as he heard what had happened, he came out to look. And there was Thomas, with an axe in his hand,

preparing already to cut away some of the smaller branches; for the tree had fallen over a favourite walk.

"Master'll be real sorry," said Thomas, as he stood leaning his axe upon the fallen trunk; "master he'll be real sorry, so he will, for that old tree. I mind many a year ago I wanted master to let me fell that tree. 'Why, master,' says I, 'it's a-takin' up the very nicest, sunniest spot in all the place. Along o' that there tree there can't nothing be growed on all that slopin' bank from the pond back to the shrubbery, and that's the place of all others I'd like to have a kitchen-garden,' says I.

"'A kitchen-garden!' says master; 'why, Thomas, you think o' nothin' but victuals. We have garden stuff more than we want, and I shouldn't think you'd care to have any more work. I like the tree,' says he, 'and I won't have it touched.'

"So the tree stood; and missy (that's your mamma, Master Arthur) she had a swing fixed in it. But it always went against me, it did, to see that bit o' ground goin' to waste."

"What will you put in it now, Thomas?" said Arthur, emerging from the thicket of branches.

"We must get the tree out of the way first, Master Arthur; time enough then to think what we'll have instead."

Mr. Goodbody now came out to view the scene of disaster.

"Poor old friend!" he said, "the place will look lonely without you. It was growing very old, though, and should soon have lost its beauty; some of the branches are almost dead. Strange that the rooks should have begun to build here this year; we should have had quite a rookery soon."

"That we should, sir, and they would have been an annoyance so near the house. But what shall we put in the place of the old tree, sir? Have you any plan in particular for layin' out this bit o' ground?"

"Nothing as yet, except getting the tree removed. When the spot is cleared, I will see what Mrs. St. George would like done. Ah! how well I remember when she had her swing in the poor old elm.—Arthur, my boy, come in with me; it is time for breakfast."

Arthur came forward, carrying carefully in both hands the most perfect of the rooks' nests,—it was to be placed in his natural history collection in the schoolroom. He regarded the fallen tree with new interest now, on account of its connection with his mother's childhood; but try as hard as he would, he could not imagine her a little girl sitting in a swing that hung out of the elm tree.

"Uncle," said he, "what was mamma like that time?"

"Very like what you would be if you were a little girl," said the old gentleman, looking at him affectionately.

Arthur was not altogether pleased with this answer. Not that he could object to being thought like his beautiful mother, but he thought he perceived an allusion to his slender and fragile appearance, and about this he was a little sensitive. He was quite sure no one had ever imagined what Charlie would be like "if he were a little girl."

Pretty and almost girlish as his features were, however, he had a firm, square little chin, and his delicately-formed lips were set together in a way that told plainly enough what a persevering little fellow he was about anything that he had once heartily taken up. He had by no means forgotten the matter about which he had taken Charlie into counsel. He turned it over in his active little mind many times during the following week, and the result was, that one evening he seated himself on a stool at his uncle's feet, and began stroking the old gentleman's hand in a certain caressing way he had that made some people call him girlish.

"Uncle," said he, "do you care very much about having ornamental things in that piece of ground where the elm tree stood?"

"Well, I should like to have it looking neat. But why do you ask?"

"Because, uncle, I want you so much, if you would not mind, to give it to me."

"Give it to you, little man! what do you want to do with it?"

"I want to make a garden there—a kitchen-garden principally. Thomas says that now the shrubs at the other side of the pond are grown up it is not so much matter about having pretty things in that piece of ground. It is scarcely seen at all from any of the walks about the house; and if you will give it to me, uncle, I will never let it be a bit untidy."

"I don't know what your mother would say to it. I intended to leave it to her to decide what we should put there."

"Please, uncle, mother says she does not mind about the ground; she is only afraid I should do too much and tire myself. But you would not be afraid of that, uncle; you like me to work in the garden, don't you?"

"Yes, in moderation I do, certainly. It is healthy and very interesting work, and I am glad you are fond of it; but would you not prefer to cultivate flowers? And why undertake such a large piece of ground to begin with?"

"A smaller piece would not be of much use, and flowers wouldn't do at all; besides, if I work there every day it will make me strong. Won't it, uncle?"

"Is that the reason you want to do it?"

"Oh no, not exactly; that's another reason, of course. But, uncle, I have a *very* good reason for wanting to do it; only I could not tell you, I think,—at least not just yet."

"Come, this is very mysterious. May I ask if you have taken any one into your confidence about the matter?"

"No one, uncle, except—except Charlie."

Mr. Goodbody laughed. "A cabinet council!" he exclaimed. "Two heads are better than one, I suppose, even if they are boys' heads." Then seeing how earnest the little fellow looked, he went on, "My boy, I really don't know how to refuse you. You may have the ground; I give you a lease of it till next October. If you fail in your plans, or grow tired of them, it will be time enough then to plant shrubs. I will have the ground dug up and dressed for you in the first instance; after that you must keep it in order yourself, with what help you can get from Charlie."

Arthur was greatly pleased to have gained this permission, and before going to bed he must tell Charlie, unless, indeed, that confidential friend should be already asleep. He was not asleep, however, though Mrs. Jennings was just advising him to go to bed, for his brown head was nodding even over his beloved natural history book. Little lads who are up early and out all day do grow sleepy betimes. He roused up sufficiently to feel and express pleasure at Master Arthur's communication.

Half an hour after, both boys were asleep; and Arthur dreamed that he went out into his garden

and found it already flourishing with yams, and pumpkins, and gorgeous West Indian flowers, and that Tom Bent, a black boy with gleaming white teeth, was tending them under a scorching sun. But as for Charlie, he dreamt not at all.

As soon as his school hours were over the next day, Arthur went out and found the ground for his new garden already being dug up. Thomas directed him to take the sod which had formed the surface, and all the grass and root-fibres, and spread them in a sunny spot, where they would get partially dry, preparatory to burning them. "For you see, Master Arthur," said he, "there was a lot of scutch-grass here under the tree, and there ain't no other way to get rid of that but by burning; and the ashes will be first-rate drëssing for your beds,—leastways it's first-rate for some things."

So Arthur's care for the next day or two was to clean his ground thoroughly, and turn over the sods and weeds for the sun and wind to dry. And then one day he and Charlie made a garden fire, and it burned away slowly night and day till there was nothing left but a heap of ashes and a few charred roots.

And while the weeds were burning the boys were laying out the ground into neat beds. Arthur would have been sadly puzzled to make them straight had not Charlie shown him how to mark out the furrows with a gardener's line. But Charlie

had had only one year's experience of gardening; and as to Arthur, the very names of English plants were strange to him; so that earnest evening consultations in the schoolroom, and much turning over of gardeners' calendars and other books, were necessary before they could decide on what to put into the beds when they were made. For when once March has set in, there is no time to be lost in making up your mind as to what to put in your garden.

Before the middle of the month, however—which Thomas assured them was still very good time—Arthur had sown a good bed of spinach, and some turnips and radishes, and two drills of peas, and after some debating a few ridges of kidney potatoes, which Charlie knew exactly how to manage, as he had just been helping with them in the big garden. And then there was only one bed left, and that was kept for lettuces; for Thomas had promised to give Arthur nice plants ready to put out in it.

So March, which had "come in like a lion, went out like a lamb," and April followed mild and soft with showers that watered Arthur's garden, and the sun shone warmly upon it, for it sloped gently to the south, and the shrubbery sheltered it from all cold winds. The shrubs budded out and blossomed, and the birds on the rain-spangled branches sang gaily between the showers, till the air was full of fragrance

and sweet sounds ; and Arthur began to respect the sturdy English plants that fight with winter every year, and burst out again fresh and joyous, to make the old earth beautiful in spring. He admired the tender green foliage until the rich growth and gorgeous colouring of his old home almost faded from his memory ; and he came to like those brave little robins and thrushes, who weather out the rough, bleak months at home, better than the swallows and cuckoos, whose nature it is to follow the warm weather and live in sunshine the whole year round.

And all the time the seeds in the garden were sprouting, and the plants were growing, so that the long May days found it green and flourishing ; for under such favourable conditions peas and turnips will grow bravely in spring-time, if you let them alone—and for that matter, so will boys.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SHEEP THAT WAS LOST.

ALL these months Tom Bent lay in the infirmary, sometimes better, then again very ill ; but altogether it was a weary time. One day in April he rose from his bed for the first time after a tedious relapse. They thought a little variety would cheer him up, so he was brought into another room and placed in a sunny window, from which he could look out on the grounds ; for the infirmary was outside the town, and very pleasantly situated.

Poor Tom had never before felt his weakness so much. He had lost much of his rough look, as rough people do after long illness. He had become very thin—his cheeks were hollow, and his eyes looked large, and the fingers of one hand were a good deal bent and crippled. When he spoke, which was not very often, his voice had the tones of illness and pain, and his words, though sometimes fretful, were not rude and insolent as formerly. On this day his whole appearance was hopeless and

broken-hearted—an expression that is pitiful to see at any time, but especially sad on a spring morning, and in one so young. There was a great horse-chestnut tree in blossom opposite the window, and a blackbird was whistling in the lilac bushes below ; but Tom heeded them not. He lay back in his chair with closed eyes, noticing nothing. Presently a visitor entered softly.

“ Well, my lad, are you better to-day ? ”

Tom opened his eyes. A dim look of welcome came into them as he saw Mr. Goodbody, for he had got to know the old gentleman quite well.

“ I be terrible weak,” he answered languidly. “ The pain’s gone for to-day, but I’m as weak as a babby.”

“ That is to be expected after what you have gone through ; but the worst is over now, and you have nothing to do but to recover your strength by degrees. It will probably be slow.”

But Tom felt so little like a person recovering his strength, that he took quite a different view of his situation. He fixed his eyes, full of an expression of painful anxiety, on his visitor’s face, and after a moment’s pause said hoarsely,—

“ Be I a-goin’ to die ? ”

The suddenness of this momentous question, and the intense earnestness with which it was asked, made Mr. Goodbody pause a moment before he said,—

"I think not; there is no reason now to suppose you will not steadily get better."

Tom seemed to breathe more freely, but the painfully anxious look did not leave his eyes. Keeping them still fixed on Mr. Goodbody, as if the presence of one like him promised him some kind of help and safety, he said piteously,—

"I be afeard to die. I didn't used to be afeard—hardly of nothing; but I'm weak now, and—I be terrible afeard—of God."

It was an admission at once sad, and yet hopeful,—sad in its tone of abject terror, which knew God only as a being before whom to tremble; hopeful in that the thought of God and his holiness, and the fear of standing before him guilty, had taken hold of the lad's mind at all.

"Tom," said Mr. Goodbody solemnly, "you do well to be afraid. It is right that we should be afraid to offend God. Sin offends him. He is against all sin. Tom, you do well to fear. But why is it death only that you fear? Is it any safer for you to *live* in sin than to die in it? Can you live on in this world with God's anger resting upon you more safely or more happily than you can pass into another?"

A visible shudder passed through Tom's frame. He closed his eyes again, and buried his face in his hands as he moaned out piteously,—

"I be afeard here and there, but I be most

afear'd there; I knows nigh the worst that can happen me here, but I knows nothing about youn." Then after a pause he added, raising his head and speaking in a tone of quiet hopelessness, "I suppose it's all one to me to live or die; there ain't no luck for me no more. If I thought 'twould be the end of everythink, and that there wouldn't be no more of me, then I'd wish I was dead—I would."

Mr. Goodbody's heart was filled with pity and his eyes with tears; but he remembered that God was more pitying still than he, and so he took courage. "Tom," he said, "did you ever in all your life say a prayer?"

"Yes," he answered slowly; "I mind when I warn't but a little chap in petticoats, when my mother were alive, she learned me to say, 'Our Father.'"

This was something; but Mr. Goodbody sighed as he remembered how little there had been in poor Tom's home-life to show him the meaning of those two words.

"Tom," said he, "I want you to listen to something that I shall tell you. Listen attentively."

"Ay, sir," said Tom submissively, "I'll listen."

Mr. Goodbody repeated for him a story you all know well, the parable of the prodigal son; and Tom listened, as people in his state will listen to anything that may save them for a while from the pain of their own thoughts. I don't think he had

any idea of the meaning underlying it, but the story interested him.

"My father ain't like *him*," he remarked when it was concluded. "If he was now!"

"Tom," said Mr. Goodbody, "'our Father' who is in heaven *is* like him."

Tom stared blankly at his visitor, and then said,—
"How so?"

"That story I have just told you is in the Bible, and it is written there on purpose to teach us how God will receive bad people who leave their bad ways and turn to him. See here is more about it; can you read, Tom?"

"Ay, sir, I can make it out a bit."

Mr. Goodbody had brought over a Testament which lay on a shelf in the room. He pointed out, and Tom slowly read the words, "Likewise I say unto you, There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth."

There was a pause, and Tom seemed to be going over the words with his eyes; then Mr. Goodbody spoke,—

"Do you know what 'repenteth' means?"

"Ain't it what you were a-talking about that morning at the breakfast, about turning?"

"It is."

"Where's them words, sir—them as was in the big letters?"

"They are in another part of the Bible. You

haven't got them in this book. I will bring them to you if you like. I will come to see you very soon again, for I have more to tell you. In the meantime read over this story again for yourself; think about it, Tom, and remember the prayer that your poor mother taught you. I don't think you will understand it all; but it is well if you get some of the meaning of those two words, 'Our Father.' " And Mr. Goodbody went away with hope in his heart for Tom.

And Tom—poor, pain-worn, crippled Tom—was there not hope dawning in his mind too? Was it not something that he had learned to tremble for the consequences of sin, and more still, that there had reached his soul that day the first faint echo of the cry, "Our Father"?

An hour afterwards, when the nurse came to bring him his tea, she found him sleeping, more easily than usual; his bent fingers clasped together, and a tear glistening on his eyelid. The shadows were lengthening in the grounds outside, but the sun still shone through the branches of the horse-chestnut tree, and on the ivy-spray near the window a little bird was singing a glad, glad song.

CHAPTER XIII.

WHY ARTHUR BECAME A GARDENER.

AFTER this Mr. Goodbody paid Tom frequent visits, and by degrees he unfolded to him "the old, old story." He told him of the redemption that has made repentance possible, and has opened to disobedient ones the way back to the Father. Poor, weary, heart-broken Tom was very ready to listen now; and as the truth took hold on his mind, it did to him what it does to all who truly receive it—it purified the thoughts of his heart, and gave him desires after good. So that from the fear which is "the beginning of wisdom" he went on to be one of those blessed ones who "hunger and thirst after righteousness," and who, the Scripture assures us, shall finally be filled. From this time forward, whatever were the failures, mistakes, and shortcomings of this rude and ignorant lad, there was always somewhere deep down in his soul an honest desire to do right, a *choosing* of good rather than evil; and this was Tom's repentance.

During these weeks the patient slowly but steadily returned to health, and though he still limped a little, and the fingers of his right hand continued stiff and somewhat distorted, yet matters were a great deal better than had been expected, and he gained so much strength that the doctor hoped he should in time still further get over the effects of his terrible illness.

In the middle of May he was pronounced to be no longer in a state to remain an hospital patient, and told that he must leave in a few days. Sad to say, this was heavy news to poor Tom; for where was he to go? how was he to live? His heart sank again as he asked himself these questions.

Other people, however, were considering these questions too, and were anxious to help him to a solution of them.

"Well, Arthur," said Mr. Goodbody one evening when the little lad had come into the dining-room for dessert, "have you been thinking ever since of how Tom Bent is to get his living?"

"Yes, uncle," said Arthur slowly, "I have been thinking of it."

Mr. Goodbody hardly expected this answer. He knew that at Arthur's age plans and purposes, however good, are seldom held to very perseveringly, and he was pleased to see this steadfastness in his nephew.

"And have you found any plan for him?"

"Ye—es; that is, I have partly," said Arthur gravely. "Uncle, when shall he be well enough to leave the hospital?"

"He is to leave next week. What is your plan, my boy?"

Arthur looked more thoughtful still. He trifled with his orange, and seemed to be forgetting to eat it. Then he said, with a little sigh,—

"I am afraid I can't help him much so soon as that—unless he could walk a good deal."

"He cannot walk at all without a stick as yet. But won't you tell me about the plan? You know I promised to help you if I could."

Arthur reddened and hesitated, then he swallowed some pieces of orange. Mr. Goodbody waited good-humouredly. He knew the little lad would tell him in the end, so he took up a newspaper and asked no more questions. Mrs. St. George had stepped into an adjoining conservatory to water some favourite flowers. Arthur finished his orange, and then came softly up to his uncle's side.

"Please, uncle," he said, "will you come out this evening?"

"I suppose I must," said the old gentleman with a mock sigh. "You're just like your mother—she never let me have a bit of my own way when she was your age."

"But, uncle, I don't want you to come if you don't like it."

"There it is," said Mr. Goodbody; "I have to go all the more because you offer to let me off. However, I'm resigned," and with these words he rose.

"It's a long time since you saw my garden, uncle," said Arthur as soon as they were outside the house, and he led the way to it.

"You really have it in very nice order," said Mr. Goodbody when they came to the spot; "and the crops are flourishing. They have done well in the new ground, you see. How did you find out how to treat them all properly?"

"Charlie helped me, and what he didn't know we looked out for in books; and when we couldn't follow the directions in the books, we asked Thomas, and he told us some easier way that would do as well."

"That was sensible; and you have had great success. That spinach is nearly fit to cut, and the turnips are swelling bravely; and you should cut some of the lettuces, or they will start for seeding. When will you tell me what you intend to do with them?"

"Well, uncle, it was part of my plan for poor Tom. You see, when first you told me to try and think of some way to help him, I asked Thomas what such a person could do; and Thomas said he didn't know unless he could sell something, and that it would cost something to set up as a 'coster,' he

called it. And Charlie and I talked a great deal about it all; but we couldn't think how to manage, for mamma said I must not ask you for money, because—because, you know, you do so much for us always. Well, then the storm came, and the tree was blown down, and I heard you talking about what should be done with the piece of ground here, and I thought if I could grow things in it I might give them to Tom to begin with; and Charlie thought it all an excellent plan. He helped me, and we have been nursing these vegetables ever since, for we thought if we only had them ready when the time came we should find some way of getting him a barrow to carry them in; but now," said Arthur somewhat despondingly, "the time is almost come, and I have only just money enough to buy a large basket, and I'm afraid that won't be any use."

Tears began to gather in Arthur's eyes; but indeed the hearts of older people than Arthur will grow heavy at the thought of the hopes and the work of many months coming to nothing in the end. Mr. Goodbody drew the boy to him.

"You have acted like a brave and sensible little lad," he said. "I can hardly tell you how much gratified I am to find you holding to a good purpose so steadily for months. At the beginning of last winter I feared I had got a helpless sort of petted little fellow in the house, who would always want

to be waited on, and never like to do anything that gave him trouble; and now I find a regular little four-square brick of an Englishman, who has not only put his own shoulder to the wheel, but has given the wheel a considerable lift out of the hole."

"But, uncle," said Arthur, anxious that his friend should share in the praise that it was so very pleasant to receive, "Charlie had as much to do with it as I had; indeed I don't think I ever should have kept on all the time but for him."

"And I am very much pleased with Charlie too. Your work shall not be lost, my dear. There are some days before us still. This is Friday evening; to-morrow I shall not be at home until night; and on Wednesday Tom leaves the infirmary. I might get them to keep him another day. Well, on Monday and Tuesday I must make it my business to see what can be done, unless you and Charlie can contrive something first. I really don't despair of that yet; you are such splendid contrivers."

Arthur thanked his uncle, and felt very well satisfied indeed. It was very pleasant to be so heartily commended, and for those very virtues wherein his best friends had considered him deficient. Now that he had once told his secret, every one in the house was soon taken into confidence, and of course all were bound to feel an interest in the final carrying out of the plans for Tom. Mrs. St. George

indeed found it hard to convince herself that her boy was in no way injured by his recent exertions; but she could not long resist the evidence of his healthy appetite, his increased cheerfulness, and the daily hardening and strengthening of his shapely little limbs.

Sally said *she* should be sorry to take so much trouble for so undeserving a person, and she prophesied Tom's speedy return to lawless courses; but every one else was hopeful.

On Sunday, when Charlie visited his mother, of course the whole story was told again, and the consequence was that on Monday Alice Bright hobbled up to Mr. Goodbody's and asked to see Master Arthur. Arthur was still at his lessons when she came, so she had to sit down in the grounds and wait for him; but it was a treat to her to sit among the flowers and watch her young brother at work, until Arthur came out and asked why she wanted him.

Well, it was just to tell him that old Jack Green, who had supplied their end of the town with vegetables since any one could remember, was laid up with a cold, and would be glad to hire out his donkey and cart by the day to any one who would keep his customers on for him. Arthur immediately went to tell this to his uncle, and the old gentleman advised him by all means to avail himself of this opportunity of initiating Tom into the "coster"

business. A couple of weeks would show whether the lad was able and willing to follow the business steadily.

"It will be much more satisfactory," said the older and wiser head, "to try him in this way than to expend a sum of money in setting him up before we know whether he will be likely to profit by it."

But of course, before any arrangement could be entered into, Tom himself must be consulted; for as yet he knew nothing of the plans for him. Charlie should be sent to tell him. If he had any objections he would state them freely to Charlie. Arthur did not think he could have any objections, or that he could possibly want ever to return to an idle or dishonest life. You see Arthur was *very* many years younger than his great-uncle. So Charlie went in the evening to the infirmary.

"Well, Tom," said he as he greeted the convalescent patient, "so you're to be let out on Wednesday. Ain't you glad?"

"No," said Tom gloomily, "I ain't partic'lar glad."

"O Tom, why so?"

"I ha'n't no call to be partic'lar glad. Of course I knew I couldn't stay here always, but I'd rather be here nor in the Union."

"But you ain't going to the Union."

"There ain't nowheres else for me. It's all very well for you to talk o' bein' glad, but what's a chap to do when he ha'n't got the use o' his two hands,

nor no one to give him work if he had? I know it's my own fault. If I'd been like you, Charlie, 'twould 'a been different; but that don't make it any better. Howsoever, as I've brewed I must bake, and there ain't no use talkin' about it."

You see there had been a great change in Tom's views since the time he had blamed "luck" for his troubles.

"But you haven't no need to bake *that* brew; leastways, not unless you like it. Master, he bid Master Arthur, and that three months ago, to think o' a way for you to get your livin'; and Master Arthur and me we've growed you a garden full of stuff—all along of the elm-tree bein' blowed down. And old Jack Green, he's got the phthisic, and he'll let you have his cart and his customers till he's able to be about again; leastways, if you agree to it all. And you're a fool if you don't. I think it's a real jolly sort o' a life—I do."

"Whatever are you talkin' about?" said Tom, looking bewildered. "What's Jack and Master Arthur and the elm-tree got to do with me an' my livin'?"

So Charlie told in a more coherent manner how thoughtful people had been making plans for repenting Tom; and when Tom was able to understand it all, it lifted a great weight off his heart. But the burden had been there so long, that he could not at first show himself as delighted as

Charlie thought he ought to be. However, when the bearer of the good news was departing, Tom, who was now able to go in and out of the house as he chose, accompanied him to the gate, and there he delivered himself in a very emphatic manner of the remarkable words—"WELL, I NEVER!" And they were certainly in a tone of well-pleased wonder.

And now there were other matters which must be seen to very promptly. How about clothes for Tom, who had been in the most disreputable rags when he entered the hospital? This was a question that Arthur began to discuss with Thomas as soon as Charlie returned.

"I wonder," said the little fellow meditatively—"I wonder whether uncle has any he doesn't want."

Thomas laughed. "Shouldn't I like," said he, "to see a coster fellow goin' round in fine black cloth clothes, and a tall silk hat, a-drivin' a donkey, and a-cryin,' 'Turnips!' I think the folks would turn out to look after him."

Arthur had to laugh himself at this picture; but the matter was too important to allow of much joking about it, so he soon became grave again, and said,—

"But what *is* to be done, Thomas?"

"It's more likely as I have some old duds that might do for a while, if they was tidied up a bit. I'll go and look them out."

So Thomas found some clothes that he had discarded ; and Mrs. Bright washed them, and Alice and Mrs. Jennings mended them ; and then they really looked quite presentable.

Thus all these good people helped poor Tom, who had brought so many troubles on himself. And in the end Sally felt ashamed of not doing something too ; so she offered to mend up some socks that master had left off wearing. And though she constantly asserted her conviction that such an idle fellow would never come to any good, yet, as she was quick and handy, her services were very useful. But with the best will in the world they couldn't have all arrangements made before Wednesday night, so that it was Thursday morning when Mrs. Bright carried the clothes to Tom.

Very soon after, Tom, sitting in old Jack's donkey-cart, stopped at Mr. Goodbody's gate ; and that good Thomas, who for the most part said little and did much, had a fine supply of cabbages ready to supplement the spinach and lettuces and young turnips which were the first produce of Arthur's garden. And Tom sold them all to Jack's customers, and did very well indeed that day.

CHAPTER XIV.

CONCLUSION.

AFTER that, all through the summer and autumn, Tom continued to supply old Jack's customers with vegetables. The old coster and his wife had taken him as a lodger, and they found him a quiet and regular inmate of their cottage.

Of course Arthur's garden did not supply all his stock in trade. He had to buy a great deal in the early morning markets, but Arthur could always supply some free, for he soon became quite an experienced gardener; and this supply, which cost him nothing, enabled Tom not only to pay for his board and for the use of the donkey, but also to lay by money every week, with a view to setting up on his own account whenever the old coster should resume his rounds.

Jack, however, did not get well, for his principal ailment was old age, and time does not cure that. When the winter came again the old man died. Tom bought the donkey and cart from the widow,

and continued to live with her until she too died, when he rented the cottage for himself; and after a time he became known as "the honest coster," which, I assure you, is not at all a bad name to be known by. By degrees he so far recovered the free use of his limbs as to be able to till the little garden attached to the cottage, and then he became independent of any help from Arthur.

So Arthur's garden was turned to other purposes. At one time, I believe, he and Charlie wished to make a botanic garden there, in order to illustrate some of their favourite studies. But Thomas complained so much of the weeds scattering their seeds all over the grounds that Mr. Goodbody was obliged to interfere with this plan. Docks and dandelions were always docks and dandelions to Thomas, no matter by what Latin names they might be called; and, indeed, every one agreed that they were unsuitable in the well-kept grounds. So the spot was planted with shrubs in the end; but that, I think, was not until just before Arthur went to school.

As Arthur's legs grew longer and his spirit more enterprising, he had many a long ramble off into the country; and there he made acquaintance with the birds that haunt our woods and the plants that grow in them, till the latter became as familiar to him as the denizens of the garden were. And Charlie, whenever he could be spared, accompanied him, for the young gardener loved nature not less than the other.

Those were lonely days for Charlie when first Master Arthur went away to school ; but he was not a boy to fret or complain. So he set to his work with a will ; and he read his natural history book in the evening, and kept his brown eyes open all day, until every butterfly and beetle, every moth and grasshopper and spider, that comes under the notice of the British gardener, was thoroughly familiar to him ; and he spoke of trees, like King Solomon.

Arthur never forgot his first English boy-friend, nor was Charlie's the least hearty welcome that greeted him each time that he returned, first from school and afterwards from Cambridge.

At Cambridge he did well, but chiefly distinguished himself by his proficiency in natural history and kindred sciences—a distinction which, when he had obtained his degree, led to an offer from a scientific society of sending him to study the natural productions of a part of the earth hitherto unexplored by any of its members.

He came home before starting on his travels, but only for a short time, to make preparations. He was now a young man of middle height, slenderly made, and active looking, rather than robust. Mrs. St. George was somewhat unwilling to trust her son to the wilds of South America. She should feel happier, she said, if he was taking some one with him—some one in the way of a servant, who would, as far as possible, look after his comforts.

"It would not be easy," said Arthur, "to find the right man for this kind of work ; and any other would be more hindrance than help to me."

"What would you think," said his uncle, "of taking Charlie Bright?"

"He is the one fellow I have ever seen that I would take. But you could not spare him, uncle ; besides, the society provides only for my own expenses."

"I will gladly spare him to you, my boy, and pay the additional expense besides. As your mother says, we should both feel happier about you if we knew you had a faithful and trustworthy companion with you—a clever fellow too, and ready at anything. I should say he's just the man for you to take, Arthur."

"Uncle, you are too good ; but I really do not like putting you to this expense, besides taking a valuable servant away from you."

"As to that," said Mr. Goodbody, "I am inclined to think Charlie's powers are thrown away here. Thomas says he is still quite able for my work, with the help of a boy, and it is a pity to keep such a fine young fellow doing a boy's work."

An hour or two later Arthur strolled out to find his old companion.

"Charlie," said he, "will you come with me?"

"Where to, sir?" asked Charlie, thinking that Mr. Arthur wanted his help somewhere at that moment.

"To South America, of course," said Arthur coolly.

"Ah!" said Charlie, with a deep breath, "if I could do *that*."

"You can if you will," said Arthur. "Uncle wishes to send you to take care of me."

Whereat Charlie, stalwart young man that he was, threw up his cap and shouted a hearty cheer. And from that day to this, at home and abroad, I am told that Charlie Bright has been right-hand man to the now well-known naturalist, Arthur St. George. Indeed, it has been intimated to me that the discoveries which the latter has made, the wild beasts he has captured, and the books he has written, could scarcely have been accomplished without the help of our hardy and hard-working "odd boy."

THE END.





